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"OLD STICK-LES"

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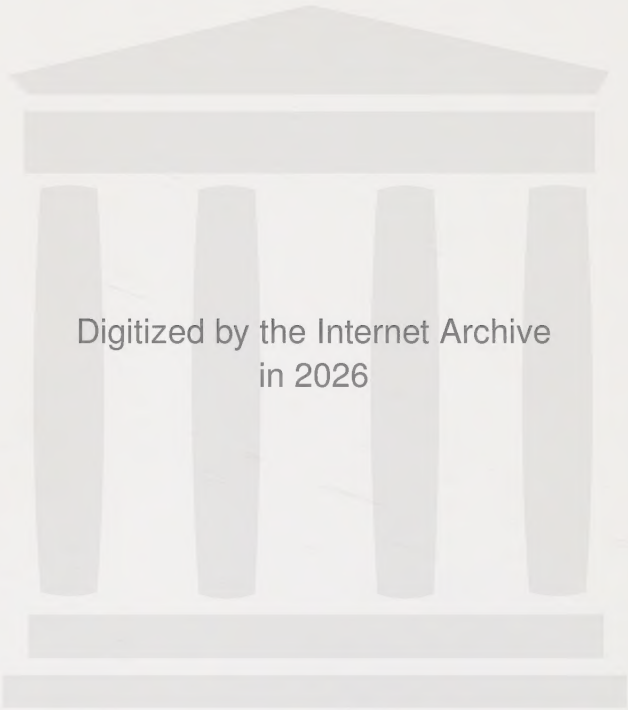
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"OLD STICK-LEG"

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MAJOR THOMAS AUSTIN
(The Author of the Diaries)

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"OLD STICK-LEG"

Extracts from the Diaries of Major Thomas Austin

ARRANGED BY
BRIGADIER-GENERAL H. H. AUSTIN
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Geoffrey Bles Suffolk St. Pall Mall
London

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"Old Stick-leg"

"CLACK-CLACK-CLACK," of wood on stone pavement. This refrain in monotone is one of my earliest recollections of Clifton as a small boy newly-arrived from India. To this day such melody brings to my mind the trim figure of a little old gentleman, with a high forehead and white moustache and whiskers, tramping sedately along the Whiteladies' Road. At every other step his wooden left leg would be jerked outwards and descend with military precision, and a resounding "clack," in front of his erect wiry frame. The sight was a novel one to us children from the East, and my brothers and I were not long dubbing the veteran, "Old Stick-leg," in our limited vocabulary. Not in any spirit of ridicule, I should state, but it seemed easier thus to describe this venerable relative of ours when telling our parents that we had met him during our walks abroad. And this appellation has remained with us ever since.

Half a century ago, Fort-Major Thomas Austin, F.G.S., stumping along the roads, was a familiar figure to dwellers in Clifton and Bristol, where he and his wife had long been settled down with a large family of elderly daughters. The sword had for many years been laid aside for the pen, and much of the old soldier's time was still spent at the Bristol Museum,

for he had written voluminously in the past on geological and other matters of local scientific interest. Several large glass cases, too, full of fossils and other relics of prehistoric times, unearthed by the octogenarian during his earlier rambles in the neighbourhood, and elsewhere, occupied considerable space in his unpretentious home.

These indications of learning appealed little, I fear, to us small sons of a stern soldier ; but what did stir our imagination was that our great-uncle should have had his left leg shot off by a cannon ball in battle ! Here was the genuine article, a real live warrior who, more than sixty years before, had enjoyed the distinction—so it seemed to us small hero-worshippers—of losing a leg in the Peninsular War. That it was not in the Peninsular but in the Siege of Antwerp, was a mere detail, and did not materially affect the wealth of awe displayed by us in the presence of our courtly relative.

It was difficult to keep our eyes off the wooden leg when seated open-mouthed facing the old major ; but we had been schooled to understand that it was rude to stare at other people's misfortunes. We were told, too, that we must on no account ask awkward questions concerning the loss of the limb, lest it should revive sad memories of the past. So, of course, we were dying to hear from the disabled soldier himself how he had managed to get in the way of the cannon ball ; whether he saw it coming along, and if so why he didn't hop out of its path ; and what it felt like to be struck so prodigious a blow. These and a host of other questions on the subject frequently trembled perilously near the brink of our inquisitive lips, but had as often to be regretfully checked.

Since those days I have had the privilege of perusing copious diaries kept by "Old Stick-leg," and I have no doubt now that, far from resenting such questions of curiosity by us lads, he would gladly have told us many of his experiences of far-off days, though his career in the army was entirely blasted by his mishap in early life, and he died a disappointed man at the ripe age of eighty-seven in 1881.

Not the least of his later sorrows was caused by his favourite son, Alfred, whom we boys never met. A handsome, dashing young officer, from all accounts, Alfred had distinguished himself by his bravery in the Crimean War, as an ensign in the 30th Foot—East Lancashire Regiment. Some years later, however, and when still a captain and brevet-major, this cousin of ours apparently developed expensive tastes, which largely outran his income. This hit the small-pensioned old man hard in settling debts of honour and other pressing demands which his wild son's limited purse was unable to meet. Ultimately, this attractive spendthrift was forced to sell out of the army, and betake himself to Australia, whence nothing more was heard of him by his parents or sisters for many years. Indeed, from the time we boys first made the acquaintance of the aged couple, in 1874, until their deaths, I do not think they ever heard from him.

Yet they would, on occasion, refer with pride to their wayward son; and his photograph, wearing Crimean and Turkish medals and the Medjidie, adorned their small drawing-room; whilst in another nook was a photo of father and son taken together some time before the prodigal disappeared from their ken.

There was an elder son, Tom, who emigrated to

Canada comparatively early in life, I believe, and remained there almost continuously until his death. In any case we youngsters never came across this cousin either.

Thus our interest in these relatives was centred chiefly on "Stick-leg;" and as we grew older and acquired a smattering of history we came to regard him as a family link with the great Napoleon's ambition to subdue our "tight little island." It is true that the old major's elder brother, our grandfather, had actually fought against Napoleon in the Peninsular War; but he had died in Canada, to which country he had emigrated with a large family in the 'thirties. Before me as I write, however, is his Peninsular medal with clasps for Corunna, Nivelle, and Nive; whilst in the case, beneath the medal, is a small plate on which is inscribed, "Francis Austin, Captain 76th Foot, 1808–1833." Our grandfather also served in the ill-fated Walcheren Expedition of 1809; and fought in the American War of 1814, being badly wounded at Plattsburg, for which he received a wound pension for life. But his death occurred at the age of sixty-five in 1853, long before any of us boys was born.

Hence, in the vivid imagery of youth, it was "Stick-leg's" acquaintance with Napoleon that was most firmly implanted in our breasts. Indeed, we almost pictured the old soldier engaged in mortal combat with the Conqueror of Europe, before being deprived of his limb! Many such fanciful myths might possibly have been removed had we been free to question the veteran on incidents connected with the substitution of a stout stick for a live leg.

The old diaries of the major came into the possession

of my father when the last of the major's daughters passed away ; and since the death of both our parents during the Great War these ancient records have still been preserved in our family. It is only recently, however, that I have had leisure to dip into these impressions of more than a century ago ; and it is in the hope that some extracts from them may prove of interest to-day that these chapters are written.

" Little Tommy," as my great-uncle was affectionately known to his brother officers, commenced his military service at an early age ; for among the various commissions handed down to us are two, as ensign and lieutenant respectively, " of a company in the Western Regiment of the Militia of the County of Middlesex," bearing the dates, 17th October 1809, and 2nd May 1810. He was born on 18th December 1794, so was not yet fifteen when gazetted as an ensign in the Militia !

He received his commission as " ensign in the 35th, or the Sussex Regiment of Foot " on the " seventeenth day of May 1810, in the fiftieth year of Our reign ; " and, may I add the signature of His Majesty, King George III, is an indecipherable scrawl ? Thus we find that the next commission, as lieutenant in the same regiment, is endorsed by " George P.R." (Prince Regent), and " given at Our Court at Carlton House, the sixth day of December 1813, in the fifty-fourth year of Our reign." The substitution of Carlton House for " Our Court at St. James " in the former of these two commissions conveys much as to the mental condition of King George III at the later period.

The 35th Foot were stationed at Shorncliffe when joined by this young ensign of fifteen and a half ; and

a year later he accompanied the regiment when it embarked at Dover in the transport *Dartmouth* for Guernsey, in order to reinforce the garrison in that important island.

II

Guernsey

THE Channel Islands at this time were threatened by invasion, and the diarist tells us: "In the years 1811 and 1812, when Napoleon the First as a sovereign, statesman and warrior, was at the highest pinnacle of human power, and all the world, except the little spots of earth known as the British Isles, and their dependent states, was crouching submissively at his feet; when the limits of the civilized universe were almost too narrow to satisfy his ever-craving ambition, and he ruled with unlimited sway over the Continent of Europe . . . he conceived the idea of invading the Channel Islands as presenting a vulnerable point by which he could assail his most potent and persistent enemy—England. With this view he collected a considerable force at Cherbourg, and on the adjacent coast, and appeared determined to carry out his schemes of aggression."

"The British Government, aware of the French ruler's intention, made the native island militia more efficient, and sent additional regiments of the line for the defence of the Islands. . . . At this period the English Channel swarmed with French privateers, and so daring had these prowlers grown that I have known them to approach sufficiently close to our shores for the Martello Towers to open fire on them. . . . To

guard against such troublesome enemies whilst at sea, we always had on deck a party of fifty men at night, with muskets ready in case of attack. It had been arranged that if one of these marauders came sufficiently nigh, the man at the helm was, if possible, to lay our ship alongside her, so that the soldiers, headed by their officers, might leap on board and clear the decks. . . ."

" One dark night when it was my watch, we thought our plan was about to be carried into execution. On seeing a vessel approaching us, I communicated with the senior officer on board, and got the men all ready for boarding. The strange ship then ran under our stern, when perhaps discovering our quality, and her commander thinking that little but hard knocks was likely to be obtained from us, hauled her wind, but gave us a parting salute by sending a shot through our cabin windows. The ball crashed through the bulkheads, and awakened those who were sleeping in their berths, but without injury to anyone, or doing material damage to our ship. It was blowing a stiff gale at the time, and was so dark that our visitor . . . was out of sight before we could alter our course to engage her."

After a boisterous passage of a fortnight's duration, the *Dartmouth* anchored in the roads off Cornet Castle, and the regiment was distributed among different barracks in the island, where they obtained some conger-eel fishing and cricket in their leisure moments. Of his pastimes, " Little Tommy " tells us that, " as from my earliest boyhood I always delighted in rambling among crags and along rugged shores, examining the natural productions usually found in such places, many hours of my time were spent amid the wild peaks and deep recesses which are characteristics of

MAJOR AUSTIN'S SWORD AND PISTOL

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the Guernsey coast. In one of my rambles it occurred to me that the granite protruding from the summit of the hill to the west of Doyle Bay, was not the apex of an extensive mass, as the hill had every appearance of being an accumulation of drift sand. Therefore, having little to occupy my summer evenings when off duty I got three or four of the soldiers, volunteers for the occasion, men who were glad to have something to do, to help in clearing away the sand from around the granite block which was partly visible on the hill-top. . . . Working with a good will the soldiers soon removed the accumulations from around the stones, when we found three horizontal blocks were resting on a number of upright pieces of granite. Then, carefully clearing the interior, we came to a floor composed of smooth circular water-worn beach pebbles, all of which were laid down with great regularity, so that the floor was perfectly level. The drift sand had no doubt gently and gradually invaded this ancient fane and covered up the pavements, until the whole interior of the cromlech was filled, and thus completely preserved the pebbles from disturbance.

"So perfectly had the sand protected the original arrangement of the floor, that not a single stone of which it was composed had been displaced from the position in which the Druids, or other people, had first placed it. It would appear from this fact that notwithstanding the great number of years that had rolled on since the pebbly floor had been laid down, no intrusive hand had disturbed this relic of a bygone superstition—this altar at which long-forgotten religious rites had been performed."

It is of interest here to state that more than forty years after this cromlech had been cleared from the

sand, which had concealed it for centuries, Mr. Pryce, the librarian of the Bristol City Library, lectured at the Bristol Philosophical Institution on Druidical remains. He then related the manner in which this particular antique memorial of an age long past had been brought to light by the exertions of "an idle young officer," who, to while away the time, had amused himself in conducting the resuscitation of this rude temple of a rude period. At the conclusion of his lecture, Mr. Pryce was somewhat taken aback to learn that the "idle young officer" was present, and then addressing him.

To prevent surprise, the whole Guernsey coast was vigilantly guarded by a chain of detached pickets; and whilst with one of these the diarist observed a boat, once, at the water's edge in Doyle Bay. "Suspecting," he says, "from certain appearances that the men in it were not following a lawful business, I hastened down to the seaside with a sergeant and twelve men from the guard on the common in front of the barracks; but before we could get to the water, the party in the boat, seeing us approach, pushed off from the shore and began pulling out to sea with all their might. Seeing that not a moment was to be lost, I ordered the guard to 'Make ready—Present,' when the people in the boat fearing a volley ceased rowing, and held up their hands in token of submission. I then made signs for them to land, which they did, and surrendered themselves into our hands. The party was found to consist of ten officers (French), who had broken their parole and seized a boat on the Sussex coast, with the intention of escaping to France. Their object in entering Doyle Bay was to search for water, from the want of which they had suffered much. They were

not aware when they cried ' peccavi ' that the firelocks of the guard presented at them were not loaded, or they might, by vigorous rowing, have got beyond the range of old ' Brown Bess ' before it would have been possible to load and fire."

The young ensign almost appears to have regretted his ruse, for he tells us that these officers would have to " expiate the crime of breaking their paroles by confinement in those floating dens of misery, the Hulks, which were moored in Portsmouth Harbour, and a sad fate it must have been." Yet he informs us that " French officers when prisoners in England frequently broke their parole, while English officers when prisoners of war in France seldom attempted it."

So anxious were the Government authorities to strengthen the defences of the island that, " every bay and creek, where a landing could be effected, was guarded by officers' detachments of regular troops, whilst at night pickets of native militia did duty in the different batteries around the coast. Strong bodies of troops were stationed at Laree, Roquer, Richmond, Doyle Bay, Grand Roque, and other places. . . . I was ordered to occupy Grand Roque before the barracks were finished. I had here no proper place for the ammunition, so the barrels of gunpowder under my charge were piled up in the little porch at the entrance of my quarters. . . . Lighted candles were frequently carried backwards and forwards through this porch, and fires were continuously burning in the two adjoining rooms. Yet this dangerous state of things was permitted to remain unaltered for months."

As books were scarce commodities in the remote station at Grand Roque, " Little Tommy " says he passed his time when off duty on rainy days in drawing

and music, "but when the weather was fine I was mostly occupied in examining the rocks in the vicinity and investigating the habits of the marine animals found on the shore."

Later, we are told that, "Before Napoleon could carry out his design of invasion, however, he had suffered reverses in the north of Europe, so that the troops collected by him at Cherbourg were required in other fields to sustain his power; and to endeavour to retrieve his fortunes, which now for the first time appeared to waver in the balance. It became evident, therefore, in 1813, that the force destined to invade the Channel Islands, finding our preparations for defence were complete . . . had relinquished the project."

The harassing coast duties of the Guernsey force were relaxed in consequence, and the troops relapsed into the dull routine of garrison duty. The monotony of the life was occasionally relieved by a fête, or dinner party at Government House. At Grand Fêtes several hundred guests assembled, but to the dinner parties the officers, irrespective of rank, were all invited in turn by Sir John Doyle. The 35th Regiment returned the hospitality by entertaining the General in Command, his Staff, Major-General Houston, the Admiral, officers of the Fleet, and so on.

"Among other notabilities we met in the island, was Edmund Kean, then a performer in a company of players, which occasionally visited St. Peter's Port. As we had little else to occupy our time when off duty, the histrionics were tolerably well patronized by the military. It was soon seen that Kean was a man of no mean talent; and we felt convinced that he only wanted a proper field for the exercise of his abilities

to become the first tragedian of the day. We had no influence with the London managers, and therefore had no direct means of advancing his interests in that direction ; but we introduced him to some influential visitors to the island, guests at our dinner table, by whose recommendation he was eventually brought before a London audience, with what success is well known to the theatrical world. Kean ever after entertained a lively recollection of the attention he had received at our hands."

The 35th always ardently hoped to be sent to the Peninsula to join the British forces there ; but this hope was never gratified, so after a sojourn in Guernsey from June 1811 till the latter end of October 1813, the writer of these diaries tells us, " I became tired of the monotony inseparable from a life of inactivity, and consequently applied for three months' leave of absence."

Having obtained his leave, he started off in the sloop *Chesterfield*, bound for Weymouth ; and during a very rough passage underwent the exciting experience of being chased by a French privateer. At first the skipper was not quite sure if the craft was friend or foe, and asked his mate what he took her for. After a careful inspection, the latter remarked, " If so be as how I knows a ship from a shaving-dish, she's either the Sandwich lugger, or that cursed French privateer from Cherbourg, which is so like her that you cannot tell t'other from which." It proved to be the Frenchman, and we are given several pages of a graphic account of the chase in the gale, during which the privateer gained hand over hand. At the height of the pursuit the only two passengers were cheerfully asked, " Gen'lemen, which would you soonest do, go

to David Jones or to a French prison ? " The captain was crowding on more sail that the sloop could safely bear, so the alternative seemed to be a capsize and journey to Davy's locker, or the carrying away of the mast and capture by the privateer. But the skipper shook out yet another reef from the sail.

" The sail thus enlarged caused the mast to bend and strain like a fishing rod, when a twenty-pound salmon has run out all your line, and the sloop forged through the water more rapidly than ever, and we now hoped that our turn to out-sail the pursuer had arrived. Had it been a friendly contest between two yachts it would have been an exciting scene, but the excitement was greatly heightened by the prospect of a French prison in the distance. It was in reality a race on which depended freedom or captivity, and each one on board the sloop felt accordingly. . . ."

" For a short time the two vessels appeared to keep the same relative distance from each other ; then the privateer seemed to gain on us. Then did we again trim our sails afresh. A rope hauled here, or a brace slackened there, appeared to give us the advantage. In this manner our hopes and fears alternately predominated, as we flew rather than sailed across the Channel. . . ."

" As I had been upwards of two years practising and instructing the soldiers in working the battery guns in Guernsey, I thought my services might be available on the present occasion ; so I said to the captain, ' Have you any ammunition on board that we may give our pertinacious follower a salute from your two guns, and perhaps by good luck we may wing her and spoil her speed ? '

" ' We have some gunpowder somewhere below,' the

skipper replied. Then stepping on to the top of the companion stairs, he called to the steward to bring up from the aft locker a couple of cartridges. This being done, I volunteered to see to the loading and levelling the guns. Before, however, we had loaded one of them, a bright flash was seen to shoot forth from the side of the privateer, and a loud booming sound was heard above the roaring surges around us, and the rushing noise of a cannon ball passing through the rigging followed ; but no damage was done.

" ' That gun's empty—try it again, Johnny,' said the skipper exultingly ; ' a miss is as good as a mile.'

" ' You won't shorten sail for a shot or two, captain. In this rough sea they'll hardly hit us ? ' said I inquiringly.

" ' We are not afraid of a broken head any more than you are, young gentleman,' replied the captain, somewhat nettled at my remark. While he spoke another bright flash broke through the darkness, followed this time by a crash which appeared to paralyse the crew of the cutter for a moment or two ; but on seeking for the damage done it was found that our figure-head, a most grotesque effigy of the polite Earl of Chesterfield, only had suffered—his wooden lordship's cranium having been knocked into splinters.

" ' Never mind, men,' I said, ' a wooden head or two knocked off an Earl or Baron is no great harm done, after all.'

" ' They've got our range now, and we shall be battered to pieces,' said the captain, evidently not relishing the kind of acquaintance the lugger was scraping with us.

" ' Wait till our turn comes,' said I, as one of our guns was pointed under my direction. We could now

see the lugger looming obscurely through the darkness, and nearing us more rapidly than could be desired. Laying the gun well on, and watching the heave of the sea, the match was applied. 'Boom,' went the gun, but no good result followed. Quick as possible I prepared for a second round, and again the match was applied. And though we were unable to see in what manner our shot had taken effect, it was evident the enemy had sustained some damage, for in a minute or two the relative distance between the two vessels had become greater.

"'Capital shot that last one,' said the captain. 'Hurrah, hurrah! you've crippled her, and if she does not riddle us, we shall get away.'

"The enemy now, as if in revenge, fired several guns in quick succession at us, but happily without effect; and though the chase still continued, we steadily increased the space between us until Portland light came full in view and greatly raised our hopes. Soon after, we ran in under the shelter of Portland Isle, and the pursuer gave up the chase."

After a vexatious examination of their belongings by the Customs' officials, Austin proceeded to Weymouth, and there took stage-coach to London, being compelled to travel all night on the outside as the inside was full. "Having been up the whole of the previous night on board the packet," he says, "I felt somewhat fatigued, so that towards morning I fell into a sound sleep: nor did I wake from my slumber until the coach was crossing Hounslow Heath, a barren waste then renowned for highwaymen and thieves of various grades."

No "Stand and deliver" occurred, however, and London was safely reached. Resting a night there the traveller set out again for Nottingham, where his

parents were temporarily residing. But he had only been a few days at home when he received a letter from the adjutant of his regiment saying that immediately after he had left Guernsey, the 35th had also sailed for England; and on its arrival at Chichester an order for a fresh embarkation had been received. The regiment was to proceed forthwith to the coast of Kent, and there embark for active service. So urgent did the emergency appear that the regiment was ordered to press every kind of available vehicle, except the mail-coaches, to convey the troops to Ramsgate.

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III

Embarkation for Holland

ON receiving this intelligence, Austin determined to start for London by the first coach, and thence to Chichester. When he reached the barracks at the latter place he was seized with " some misgivings about entering the square, lest something might occur to detain me with the depôt, a thing which I so much dreaded that I determined, if it could be accomplished, to follow the regiment whatever the consequences might be. . . . I waited outside the barrack gate until I learned from a sergeant of my own regiment the names of the officers appointed to remain at home. Somewhat assured that I was not among the number, I went to the Adjutant's quarters and there . . . relieved of all anxiety on the subject, I returned to mine inn and slept soundly till the following morning, when I was early at the barracks to rummage out my uniform. . . ."

He then hurried off in the track of the regiment by taking a post-chaise to Horndean on the Portsmouth-London road, where he caught a coach which landed him in London the following morning. He was off again the same evening for Ramsgate in the hope of overtaking his companions-in-arms before they embarked. " It was a dark night and punctually as St. Paul's clock chimed forth the two-quarters after five

o'clock, the coachman mounted his box, adjusted the ribands, glanced round with the air of one in charge of an important trust, to see if his passengers were all up and seated, and then with a firm voice cried, 'Hold hard!' at the same time giving his leaders a slight application of the whip, when away rolled the Ramsgate night coach from out of the yard of the Cross Keys Inn, Wood Street. . . .

"The comparative slow pace at which we passed along Cheapside, thronged as it was with carts, wagons, and carriages of every description, gave us an opportunity to adjust our legs, so that by the time Fish Street Hill appeared in view our lower limbs had been mutually interlaced in alternate sections like the serried teeth of a rat-trap; and by the time the coach arrived at the Stonesend Borough the company were jolted into a wish to become acquainted with each other. . . .

"My next neighbour on my right was a man of large size, closely enveloped in a rough coat, his head covered with an equally rough-looking fur cap; and he appeared as one vested with some authority, for he began to question the company as to their destination, etc., when it was found that one and all were hurrying to the coast to embark with their regiments. On interrogating me and ascertaining the number of the corps to which I belonged, he inquired:

"'Were you in Guernsey with the Thirty-fifth, and if so do you remember one John Brown there?'

"'Yes; and I perfectly recollect Colonel Brown commanding the Pompadours (56th),' I replied.

"'I am the man,' was the rejoinder, and mutual congratulations at again meeting were expressed.

"The gallant John Brown of Barossa, the name by

which he was known in the army, had always been a welcome guest at our mess-table, at which he generally dined once a week during his stay in Guernsey. Colonel Brown was a man of soldierly habits and speech, of great personal courage but of rough exterior. The few short sentences he usually addressed to his men when leading them into action had a wonderful effect in inspiring them with confidence in themselves and in their leader. At the Battle of Barossa, Colonel Brown commanded a battalion of Light Infantry, and when opposed to a very superior force of the enemy he addressed his men somewhat as follows:

"'My lads, you now see the enemy before you; and, if you look round, I dare say behind you also. So what lucky fellows you are to have such an opportunity of distinguishing yourselves. You must thrash the scoundrels right soundly or they will assuredly give you a drubbing. Now hammer away at them with all your might.'

"At a subsequent period in Holland, after his promotion, and when he commanded the 4th Battalion of the 56th Regiment, the enemy had placed two guns on the road by which we advanced; which guns annoyed by the precision of their fire. So John Brown thus addressed his men: 'Do you see those two guns and the rascals firing them at us?' The men all looked in the direction indicated. 'Let's take a run at them.' And away went John Brown and his Pompadours, and carried the battery in an instant with the loss of one or two men only.

"Such things as these may appear trifling on paper, but those who have the command of troops know the magic influence such unadorned oratory exercises over soldiers.

" After a protracted service of many years' duration, Lieut.-Col. Brown, then major in the 28th Regiment, applied to the Commander-in-Chief for promotion, and concluded his memorial in these words : ' For the period of thirty years, the 28th Regiment never *fired ball cartridge* that John Brown was not present with it.'

" The 28th Regiment was known in the army by the sobriquet of ' The Slashers.' The origin of the title is said to be as follows : The 28th was brigaded with several other regiments each of which bore a distinguishing title, such as ' The King's Own,' etc., whilst the 28th alone were like the honest sailor who said his name was plain Tom, without trimmings. During an inspection of the brigade, after the several officers in command of battalions had given the word of command to their respective regiments, ' King's Own-attention,' ' Queen's Royals-attention,' etc., John Brown shouted out in a stentorian voice, ' Slashers-attention,' to the no small astonishment of those who heard him. The men, accustomed to his word of command, obeyed with alacrity ; but they marvelled as to the manner in which the new title had been obtained."

The narrator of these memoirs seldom loses an opportunity of forcibly criticizing the jobbery and favouritism displayed in the British Army of more than a hundred years ago ; and in the case of the gallant officer lauded by him remarks, " But John Brown was neither a courtier, nor a cockney campaigner ; consequently his promotion was exceedingly slow."

When the coach reached Ramsgate, it was learnt that the 35th had been moved to Margate ; so, after a hurried breakfast, " Little Tommy " walked over to " that paradise of London citizens, where my delight

in again joining my companions was very great, as may be imagined."

He then goes on to tell us that "several thousand troops were already assembled on the Kentish coast, and were waiting for vessels to convey them to Holland, where the people had declared themselves in favour of the House of Nassau. In the meantime attempts were made to brigade and accustom the different regiments to act in concert; but so deficient in military knowledge were most of the assembled regiments, chiefly weak second battalions, that on our first essay at military evolutions on a large scale, the greatest confusion prevailed. When the word of command was given to 'Form square to resist cavalry,' only three regiments, viz., the 35th, 52nd and 95th Rifles out of about twenty, acted correctly. . . . The regiments which acted correctly were very properly marched back to quarters, but the others continued at drill till nightfall.

"As a proof of the wonderful stolidity displayed in the arrangements emanating from our public departments, and which has in all times produced such discreditable disasters, one little fact deserves to be recorded. The 35th Regiment had been hurried by forced marches from Chichester to the coast of Kent; but, strange as it may appear to those unacquainted with our system of Red Tape and Routine, and the wretched administrative talent employed in the public service, after hurrying night and day to the point of embarkation, it was found that the vessels which were to convey them to the Continent still remained at Portsmouth, only eighteen miles from Chichester, whence the 35th had been sent with such precipitous haste! . . .

"At length, after a fortnight's detention on the

coast which was spent in brigading and learning the troops to act in concert, some transports arrived in Ramsgate, and the morning of the 9th December was fixed on for the embarkation to take place. Accordingly we marched from Margate so as to arrive at the appointed hour; when, with our clothes completely saturated with the heavy rain which had fallen during our march, it was discovered that the troops previously quartered in Ramsgate were more than sufficient to fill the ships allotted for the service. So we had to remain, soaked to the skin as we were, until other arrangements were made. After considerable delay I was directed to wait upon the magistrate to see that the number of billets required were provided for the regiment."

And a nice little trap the young officer fell into at the rapacious hands of "mine host of the London Hotel," on which house the Headquarter staff of the regiment and half the officers were billeted, the remainder being accommodated elsewhere. "Mine host did then and there beguile me into the belief that if the whole of the officers dined at his hotel he would furnish them with beds free of expense without the trouble of procuring billets, which would have franked them for the night's lodging. On the faith of this understanding I ordered dinner for the whole number of officers present with the regiment provided it met with their approbation, and thought no more about the billets. This arrangement I notified to my brother officers, who cordially approved of it.

"The evening passed pleasantly enough, as all such evenings do when there is just sufficient excitement to make men forget the petty annoyances which 'flesh is heir to'; and as in our case thoughts wandered to

imaginary battle-fields, and our prospects of immediate embarkation, we were all in the highest of spirits when we retired for the brief time allotted to us for repose.

"Soon after one o'clock a.m. the bugles sounded the Assembly. We fell in thus early as we had a march of fourteen miles to get over in order to reach Deal by seven o'clock, the hour appointed for embarkation there.

"As each officer descended from his dormitory, judge his astonishment at finding mine host stationed at the foot of the stairs, slate in hand, to take down the number of the rooms; and he peremptorily ordered each of those who were not billeted on his house to stand and deliver half-a-crown for his bed.

"'How is this?' I inquired, 'Did you not propose to furnish beds for all the officers of the regiment, provided they dined at your hotel?'

"'Truly I did,' replied mine host, 'but I never said they were not to pay for them.'

"The trick was evident, but as the men were getting under arms there was no time to haggle about the matter; so the extortion was submitted to, and he of the London Hotel reaped the fruits of his imposition."

Long before day dawned the regiment entered the narrow streets of Deal on a cold, damp and dark December morning; and at once marched to the long shelving beach, whose margin was studded with small quaint fantastic brick and wooden houses and sheds; and rows of capstans, by which the boats were launched through the surf that beat upon the shore. It was evident, though, from the long line of foaming surf breaking on the shingles that the sea was then too rough to attempt to embark from an exposed open beach. The boatmen reported the impossibility of effecting a

safe embarkation whilst the gale continued; so the regiment was marched to barracks.

At length about midday, the hardy boatmen undertook to make the attempt to get the troops on board the ships waiting in the Downs; and it may be of interest to compare the primitive methods of a century ago with the ease and dispatch of the embarkations of multitudes of troops at our sea-ports during 1914–18.

"The boats were high and dry beyond the reach of the tide, with the wooden rollers placed at intervals on the shingles, over which we were to be launched, and then on through the surf that broke in snow-white foam along the shore. The boat's crew were all ready and quietly waiting for us. Being the first to arrive on the beach, we (the Light company) at once, under the direction of the boatmen, entered one of their splendid sea-boats, in which forty-four soldiers and three officers were stowed, with the addition of three of those hardy mariners to manage it. . . .

"Each person having taken the place assigned to him, and the soldiers desired to remain perfectly still, the word 'Ready' was given. The rope which held the boat was loosened, the windlass spun round and the boat rushed down the declivity as a courser flies to the goal. The foaming surf was reached and dashed away on either side, and the next instant the boat floated beyond the breakers. Sail was then hoisted and we steered for H.M.S. *Regulus*, proudly riding at anchor in the Downs.

"The operation of launching the Deal boats down the shelving beach, and through the surf, though apparently beset with perils, is attended with little or no danger. It must, however, at all times require great

skill and care to prevent accidents. In this instance, the boats being heavily laden with men, the perfect steadiness of the boatmen, and their clever handling of the boats, evinced great skill and intelligence. Of the two thousand men embarked in the manner here described, only one boat with a party of the 95th Rifles was capsized, and fortunately not a single life was lost."

The wind was, however, unfavourable, and the wretched soldiers were nearly two hours beating against it before they arrived alongside the transport, a "ship of war, armed *en flute*." Many of the men were prostrated owing to the roughness of the sea, and the writer tells us, "the sailors looking contemptuously on the sea-sick lobsters (soldiers) as they came alongside. As I have never felt the least sensation of sea-sickness when in an open boat, however high the sea may run, I was enabled to mount the ship's side with the same ease and as rapidly as a jolly young reefer would have performed the feat. This alacrity won for me at once the good opinion of the seamen, who stood upon the deck to assist those in the boats to get on board. . . ."

That night proved a tempestuous one; and about 1 a.m. a tremendous uproar arose, owing to one of the ships of the fleet, the *Grampus*, dragging her anchor and drifting against the *Canopus*, thus fouling her rigging. "After great exertions, much noise, and innumerable breaches of the third commandment, the vessels were got clear of each other, with but little damage beyond the destruction of such parts of the rigging as it was found necessary to cut away."

For the next two days, too, the ships were compelled

to remain at anchor in the Downs ; and the writer of these diaries employs this period of inactivity in giving " a summary of the operations which had taken place between the contending Powers of the Continent." But as this summary covers many pages of manuscript, and includes a very full account of the Battle of Leipzig —then regarded as the most stupendous conflict of modern times—details of which he obtained direct by " conversing with many of those who were engaged in the grand movements of a world in arms, when these transactions were fresh in the memory," I am constrained by considerations of space to give an outline only of his summary. This seems desirable in order to enable the reader to comprehend why British troops were being transported thus to the Low Countries.

Briefly then ; after the retreat of Napoleon from Moscow in 1812, the British Government concluded a treaty with Bernadotte, the Crown Prince of Sweden, whereby, in return for a subsidy of £1,000,000, he undertook to co-operate with the allied sovereigns by furnishing a contingent of 30,000 Swedes. In this manner we subsidized practically every nation in Europe, " paying them exorbitant sums to induce them to fight for their own independence ; so that had the struggle continued a few years longer England must have become bankrupt, and unable to meet the public engagements. In the last year of the war, our expenditure exceeded £150,000,000, while the revenue did not amount to one-third of that enormous sum."

The treaty with Bernadotte ratified, the British Government sent a force of about 3,000 men under the command of Major-General Gibbs to co-operate with

the Swedes. This force landed on the island of Rugen, and marched across it to Stralsund, where they were quartered on the inhabitants, and treated by them with kindness. The French, under General Morrand, destroyed most of the fortifications on the island when they withdrew from it, and these it was considered advisable to repair. The Crown Prince had taken all men capable of bearing arms, so that the tradesmen and wealthy burghers had to mount guard at the town hall, and perform other duties as private soldiers, while every man capable of labour was compelled to assist the British in repairing the works. About one thousand young women were also employed, and found to be almost as efficient with the spade and pick as the men. "Many of these damsels adopted male attire, which caused some strange mistakes, and provided much mirth among our soldiers, who, in their unsophisticated attempts at gallantry, when proffering their attentions were not always sure of the sex they addressed."

In September 1813 the British troops left Stralsund to conform with the movements of the allied armies. The inhabitants of the towns treated them well, but in traversing agricultural districts the ravages of war and its insatiable demands were strikingly visible. The country had been alternately occupied by friend and foe, and its resources exhausted; and as no commissariat had been organized the troops had to subsist on potatoes, and such fruit as the country produced.

Meanwhile the titanic struggle of Leipzig had terminated on the 19th October in the discomfiture of Napoleon, the loss of the French in the three days' fighting being estimated at the time as more than

60,000 men and 250 guns ; whilst those of the Allies, in killed and wounded, exceeded 43,000.

" The Battle of Leipzig which, with short intermission, lasted three days is, with the exception perhaps of Borodino, or as the French call it, ' of the Moskwa,' the most sanguinary recorded in modern history ; for it has been computed that upwards of 100,000 men were killed and wounded on that extensive field. This battle was the result of the grand plan of operations acted on by the allied armies of Europe under the command of Bernadotte, who had been appointed Generalissimo. This fortunate man, who had originally been a common soldier, and sergeant in the French army, had, thro' admiration of his great abilities and courage, been elevated by the Swedish Diet, and the favour and power of Napoleon, to the rank of Crown Prince of Sweden. . . . Bernadotte had emperors, kings, and princes under his command, and all gave a willing obedience to his superior military talent. The signal defeat at Leipzig, and defection of some of Napoleon's allies, who had abandoned him at a most critical moment, compelled the French army to hasten its retreat to the Rhine. At this juncture the British Government conceived the idea of sending an army to act on the French flank more to the south, and at the same time to relieve Holland from their domination. Accordingly, the troops under General Gibbs marched to Rostock and Lubec on the shores of the Baltic, where they embarked on the 2nd November 1813.

" On the 12th December, this force arrived at Helvoetsluys, which place had just been evacuated by the French. The transports proceeded up the river, therefore, to Williamstadt, which had also been aban-

doned by the enemy. Here a landing was effected without opposition, and the troops obtained a few days' rest, which they much required, whilst waiting for the arrival of the Expedition from England."

IV

Landing in the Low Countries

"THE day on which General Gibbs arrived at Helvoetsluys, Sir Thomas Graham and his troops were detained in the Downs by an adverse wind ; but to the great delight of us all, on the morning of the 13th December, upwards of one hundred soldiers were ordered to man the capstan bars ; and to the lively tunes played by fife and drum, the capstan revolved merrily on its axis till the anchor was raised. Then the drums and fifes struck up ' Off she goes,' and we were fairly under sail.

" A cold, dense fog soon after came on, so that we could not even see the ships that we knew were close around us. On the 14th the same obscurity prevailed, and we cast anchor on a sand-bank off the Dutch coast, the wind having now died away. Calms and fogs had retarded our progress considerably, so that our patience and fresh provisions were alike nearly exhausted ; for of the latter our messman had only taken supplies for two days.

" At length we were gratified by the announcement that our ship had entered the Scheldt ; but the fog continued so dense that our field of view extended only a few yards around us. Proceeding under easy sail and taking soundings every instant, we crept slowly onwards till the fog presently cleared away for

a brief space before us. Then an imposing scene presented itself to our sight—one more like a magical illusion, by its suddenness, than a substantial reality. This was a British fleet of nineteen sail of the line and several frigates under the command of Admiral Young, with two or three Russian ships of war, riding proudly at anchor in the Roompot. The vessels were all decked out with orange-coloured flags in honour of the Prince of Orange, and made a very gay appearance. Our troopships were in the midst of the fleet before each saw the other; and as we had no idea that a naval force had preceded us, our surprise, as may be imagined, was very great.

"With the alacrity of British sailors the yards were manned, the bands of the different line of battleships struck up the National Anthem, and the regimental bands acknowledged the compliment by playing 'Rule Britannia,' while a hearty cheer from all hands resounded for miles around, and told the enemy, who occupied the adjacent islands of Walcheren and Beverland, that British valour was again to put forth its energies against the power of their mighty ruler, and to assist in restoring the fallen kingdoms of Europe.

"The damp, chilly atmosphere during our brief voyage had proved most uncomfortable, and as my berth was incommoded with an object which the sailors have facetiously dubbed a 'Quaker,' the cold was in consequence much increased. The 'Quaker' on board our old men-of-war was, like the Quakers on shore, quiet and inoffensive. It was, in fact, a wooden gun, whose threatening muzzle protruded through a sham port-hole; and as there was a small space between the said dummy gun and the sur-

rounding woodwork, the cold damp air rushed into my cabin in a most uncomfortable degree.

" The partial clearance of the fog enabled us to take up a position between the fleet and the island of Walcheren, where we cast anchor. Everything was speedily made snug, whilst Sir Thomas Graham and Admiral Young met on board the flagship to arrange about further proceedings. Presently an order arrived on board for us to prepare to land on the following morning. This order created a feeling almost amounting to dismay among those who had participated in the disastrous Expedition of 1809, when some thousands of lives were sacrificed through the incapacity of an inefficient commander.

" It will be as well to observe here that in the year 1809, between 70,000 and 80,000 men of all arms, including seamen, left the shores of England for the ill-fated expedition to Walcheren, under the command of the Earl of Chatham. I remember as a boy seeing the main body of this vast armament, which numbered upwards of one thousand vessels of various sizes, pass up the English Channel, presenting a sight like unto a complete forest of masts, which made every one who witnessed it feel proud of his country. . . .

" The total want of arrangements, of forethought, the absence of information or common precaution on the part of our Government throughout this calamitous, this most expensive and boasted expedition, which astonished the world by its magnitude, was never equalled in any age or country, except England, and is almost beyond belief. It would have paralysed the abilities of the best general in existence, and rendered his genius abortive. As the command of the troops was entrusted to one of

the most unscientific of officers, it requires no stretch of imagination to believe in the misery produced by his indolent habits and want of professional knowledge. . . .

"At this important moment the Duke of Portland, then premier, was hopelessly paralysed: the old king was gradually sinking into a state of imbecility. Pitt and Fox were both dead; and Napoleon at the very zenith of his power, his genius unimpaired by age, his actions unclogged by aristocratic nonchalance, which exercised such a sinister influence over all our plans. . . .

"When Flushing was surrendered, Moret, the French commandant, told Lord Chatham that, 'unquestionably his Lordship's batteries were very fine when they did open, but they were so long in opening that the French believed he was waiting to paint and whitewash them.'

"The absurd delays in everything connected with this ill-managed expedition gave rise to the following epigram, in which both Admiral and General come under the lash:

> Earl Chatham, with his sabre drawn,
> Was waiting for Sir Richard Strachan;
> Sir Richard, longing to be at 'em,
> Was waiting for the Earl of Chatham.

"Of the 33,000 soldiers composing the Walcheren Expedition, upwards of 11,000 were attacked with the fever incidental to the country. The medical staff had made no provision to resist this horrible scourge. The sufferings of the victims to this fever in its different stages were dreadful. Their ghastly, cadaverous, unnatural looks, recumbent, sitting, or

endeavouring to walk with tottering steps, quivering muscles and chattering teeth, when the ague fits were on, and their attenuated frames, presented a sad sight to behold. . . .

"In a letter from the Emperor Napoleon to the Emperor of Russia, dated Schönbrun, 10th October 1809, he wrote thus: 'I send to your Majesty the latest English newspapers. You will see in them that the Ministers are fighting with each other (probably alluding to the duel between Lord Castlereagh and Mr. Canning); that there is a revolution and perfect anarchy in the Ministry. Words cannot describe the folly and inconsistency of these men. They have just caused from 25,000 to 30,000 men to perish in the most horrible country in the world; and so pestilential are the marshes of Walcheren, that they might as well have thrown those men into the sea.'"

With this brief résumé of our author's incursion into the hideous blunders of the Walcheren Expedition, in which his elder brother had taken part, it is time to press on with the narrative that more closely concerns his own experiences.

"At daybreak on the morning of the 16th December, according to orders received the previous night, the boats of the fleet were alongside the different troop-ships, down whose sides a stream of men and officers hurried and crowded into the boats; and as soon as each was filled it pushed off from the ships. Loud cheering from the boats and men-of-war, the sailors vieing with the soldiers as to which could cheer the loudest, made the enemy, who lined the sands along the shore of the island of Walcheren, aware of our intention to land. The force on the island amounted to about 4,000 men.

"The gloomy looks of those who had accompanied the 35th in the previous Walcheren Expedition, and knew by experience what warfare was in a low swampy island, might have well disheartened younger soldiers; but, thoughtless to a degree, those dismal countenances only gave rise to mirth and sharp jokes. . . .

"When all the boats had received their living freight, and got well away from the ships, we began to observe a more regular order and formed into line, so that a simultaneous landing might be effected. It was a moment of great interest to see that long line of boats approach the enemy's shore, and the enemy waiting to oppose the invasion. But just as our line was completely formed, a gun was fired from one of the ships, and signals made to recall the boats. Accordingly, we put about and returned to our respective ships—to the delight of those who had experienced a foretaste of Walcheren disagreeables. . . .

"Soon after getting on board, the troopships got under way to proceed higher up the Scheldt, important events having taken place which rendered it necessary for our general to alter his plans. . . .

"The Dutch, what with conscriptions and other grievous oppressions, were heartily tired of their dependence on France. . . . No sooner was it known that the French had suffered reverses than a revolutionary spirit became manifest; and when it was known that England would assist in restoring the exiled Royal family, the people rose as if of one accord and proclaimed the Prince of Orange as their sovereign. The French had withdrawn the garrisons from several places and greatly weakened others;

so that when the people decided on the return of their exiled Prince, it became imperative on the French to abandon all those places that did not offer salient or commanding points of resistance. How they were able to hold the extent of country they did, after so many defeats and disasters, with Europe united in arms against them, appears wonderful; but the secret is that Napoleon selected none for command but men of undoubted capacity. . . .

"The Stadt-holder, or Prince of Orange, had been driven from Holland about eighteen years previous to the arrival of our expedition. He retired when the French republican forces, having overrun Belgium and entered Holland, drove the British army commanded by the Duke of York from one position to another until, through the hardships and disasters it had encountered, it became disorganized. The guns and stores were abandoned, and the dispirited remnant of a fine army was happy to escape to its ships and return home. . . .

"Napoleon, by the numerous defections of his allies who, one after the other, abandoned him in the hour of need, was now placed in a position at once so critical and difficult that his overthrow appeared inevitable, unless France rose as one man to his assistance, and enabled him to repel the tide of invasion which, at the close of 1813, seemed to be rolling with continually accumulating force towards the frontiers of his empire. Unless he could succeed in concluding such pacific arrangements with his enemies as would give peace to Europe, he could not expect to escape the cordon that was drawing close around him. His foes hemmed him in on every side; the whole northern frontier of France was threatened; while Wellington

with a victorious army was gradually approaching the south. . . .

"The English force under Sir Thomas Graham was now about to become the last feather-weight in the balance that would eventually ensure Napoleon's overthrow. And as we sailed slowly against the current of the Scheldt various were the speculations as to our point of debarkation, and future scene of operations. . . .

"The fog which had more or less prevailed since our arrival off the Dutch coast still continued. . . . During our passage up the river the lead was kept constantly going, to which, having little else to do, we paid great attention. Between this very necessary operation and gazing at the almost interminable flocks of wild fowl, which flew across the water and sometimes over the ships, the time slipped away. Widgeon, teal, golden-eyes, ducks and geese passed in such abundance as to astonish all who witnessed the rapid succession of flocks, or rather the one continuous stream of feathered bipeds. . . .

"We continued our course for some time along the coast of the island of Schouwen, and in the afternoon we anchored at a short distance from Zuirickzee, its capital, with the intention of effecting a landing there; but on communicating with the authorities on shore, it was ascertained that the inhabitants had taken up arms and declared their allegiance to the Prince of Orange; and that the few French troops forming the garrison on the island had been quietly withdrawn. This again rendered it necessary to change the plan of operations, and although an order to prepare to land had been issued, it was not acted upon. . . .

" On the morning of the 17th our ships were again under way to proceed still higher up the branch of the Scheldt we were in. Our progress was slow, for somehow or other we always contrived to have the tide against us whenever we moved ; but the breeze was fair and sufficiently strong to enable us to stem the current, and we crept up the river at an easy rate until we arrived off the island of Tholen, where we cast anchor. . . .

" Immediately our ships had anchored orders were issued for the troops to land. The purser served out three days' provisions, consisting of fat salt pork and lean salt beef, with hard ship biscuits to match ; but instead of measuring our allowance of spirits he filled our canteens, or small barrels, to overflowing with rum. The rum was, however, a superfluous commodity to me, who scarcely ever tasted spirits in any form. . . .

" The Light company of my regiment, the 35th, had the honour of forming the advanced guard. The two other officers belonging to it and myself took our stations in the small boat which was to tow the larger one containing the men. All being ready the word was given, ' Let her loose and she'll go like a dilly duck.' We pushed off from the ship's side, when a loud cheer from all on board, answered by those in the boats, gave the enemy notice of our determination to land in defiance of all opposition. A few straggling shots as we approached the shore indicated that no serious opposition was intended, but they were sufficient to stimulate the sailors to increased exertion. The naval officer in command of the boat called out to the rowers as the bullets whistled past our ears, ' Pull, pull, pull like h—, men,' naming

a place not at all pleasant to be pulled into. But the unmeaning phrase had the desired effect, and the boat moved rapidly through the water, the land was soon gained, and my brother officers and myself leaped ashore. The large boat touched the ground almost at the same instant, and the men, as eager to land as their officers, jumped on shore and formed up in proper order.

"With about twenty men as an advanced guard, I dashed up the sloping shore; but the enemy were not disposed to attempt to obstruct our proceedings, and retired hastily. We followed them for some distance, but were unable to overtake them. A bugle from the regiment sounded the recall and the pursuit was discontinued. . . ."

On returning to the water side Lieut. Austin had an opportunty of examining the methods then adopted to keep the island from being washed away by the tide, which, he says, "is accomplished with almost incredible labour. . . . The ends of long wisps of straw are thrust down into the soft mud with a forked iron rod, so that the loops formed by the doubling of the wisps are alone visible on the surface, and give the shore an appearance of being covered with coarse loose matting, until the common sea wrack, or kelp weed, attaches itself to such parts of the straw as are exposed on the surface, and, acting as one ever-moving breakwater, mitigates the force of the waves, and in a great degree prevents the eroding action of the water. . . .

"Some men were busily at work with straw wisps . . . when we landed, nor did they wholly desist from their labour during the time we remained on the shore of the island; nor did they evince the slightest

LANDING TROOPS IN THE NAPOLEONIC WARS

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inclination to ascertain the purport of our unexpected visit. The 'mind your own business' was never more completely exemplified. The Dutchmen's business was to repair the matted shore, and to that object alone they devoted themselves. A foreign army landing on their native soil was nothing to them. So that they could carry on their own affairs unmolested, why care about the world's doings at large? This must be true philosophy, which no idle curiosity can turn aside. . . .

"The day had closed long before the debarkation of the troops was completed; but when a sufficient number to form a brigade had landed, an order to move on was given; but without any definite directions as to our halting-place. In obedience to the order we at once started on our way along the muddy road before us, and such a road we had never marched on before. Our corps was a Sussex one, but the veriest Sussex boor, bad as the cross- and by-roads were in his native county, had never encountered such an appalling conglomeration of mud as we then plunged into. Up to the knees at every step we floundered through it, and being good marchers we made tolerable progress, and soon passed through the small town of St. Martin's Dyke, and onwards in the direction of Tholen—the principal place in the island and strongly fortified. But we were as yet uncertain whether the enemy had abandoned it, or meant to hold it and stand a regular siege. . . ."

When within about a mile of Tholen, the regiment was ordered to march back in the dark to St. Martin's Dyke, a distance of some six miles, because a neglectful staff officer had not troubled to convey the general's instructions to the advanced guard to

bivouac at St. Martin's Dyke. It may be imagined, therefore, that some bitterness of feeling was created by it having to retrace its footsteps in the blackness of night through that slough of mud again.

"On our return to St. Martin's Dyke it was a considerable time before we could get the men housed, for the different regiments which had not marched beyond the town had appropriated most of the buildings. At length we contrived to get under some kind of shelter for the night, and my host and his family did all in their power to make me and the two other officers with me as comfortable as the crowded state of their house would admit of. . . . When we spoke of retiring to rest, the Dutchman said he would fetch a neighbour who could speak English; but we could make nothing of this Boer either, for his jargon was as unintelligible to us as that of his countryman who, on being asked how often he shaved, replied, 'Dree times a week, ebery day but Soonday, and den I shabe ebery day.'"

After throwing off their boots and uniform jackets, the tired officers lay down on the beds supplied, and were soon fast asleep; but they were up again before early dawn, when the troops assembled under arms, "as is usual in active warfare, and remained at their posts till full daylight, when, after a careful scrutiny of the country round the town . . . the pickets were called in and we returned to our billets, where we found a much better breakfast prepared than we could have expected.

"Whilst at breakfast the unsophisticated islanders continued coming into the apartments as people desirous to see the lions are wont to do. The young

women in particular, with the curiosity of their sex, were eager to see the strangers. Simple in their habits, they evinced very little shyness, and came forward to examine our dresses, swords, etc. The silver bullion of our Light Infantry wings attracted a great share of admiration, and the fair damsels pronounced it, 'moi' (fine); and it was evident that we had their best feelings with us. Our orange-coloured facings had perhaps contributed to secure their good-will. At a former period the 35th had been a favourite regiment with William III and had acted as his bodyguard; but when King William IV ascended the throne he made it a royal regiment and the orange was changed into blue.

"Before our repast was finished we were ordered to prepare to march, so there was but little time to look about. The quaint old houses (*Hibernice*), all gables and no fronts, did not fail, however, to arrest our attention; and the inhabitants, in dress, address, manners and customs, reminded us that we had crossed the sea and were no longer in England. The wooden shoes which all the people wore, from the little child which could just toddle alone, to the old men and women, were not the least among the many surprising novelties which attracted our notice. The use of foot stoves by the women was another cause of surprise to us. No sooner did a female acquaintance of the family enter the room in which we were than a small earthen pan was filled with glowing embers raked from the stove fire, and then slid into a little square wooden box, the top of which was perforated with various designs. The shoes were then taken off and the feet placed on the perforated top of the apparatus as if on a cushion, the clothes being adjusted

around, so that the feet and lower limbs had the full benefit of the warmth derived from the pan of fire. . . .

"The interruption of all intercourse between the English and Dutch for so many years had rendered the people of both countries almost as much strangers to each other as if an interminable ocean flowed between and separated them. Therefore to me, and all the young men with the expedition, the novelty of everything around kept us constantly amused. Europe had not then been overrun by modern Goths. . . .

"It was soon ascertained that the enemy had abandoned Tholen; therefore the preparations to invest it were rendered unnecessary, and we at once resumed our march along the muddy road of which we had had a foretaste on the previous night. When we arrived before Tholen, the troops soon found shelter in the farm-houses and capacious barns which were scattered about the vicinity. The Brigade of Guards, as a matter of course, secured to themselves the more comfortable quarters, and less disagreeable duties in the town!

"When our men had got under shelter . . . I could not resist the temptation of going back about three miles to an inviting-looking marsh for aquatic birds, which we had passed on our march from St. Martin's Dyke, in hopes to bag a wild duck for dinner. Accordingly, armed with a musket and some square pieces of lead, which one of the men had cut from a flattened bullet or two, to answer the purpose of patent shot, together with some coarse Service powder, I started on my sporting excursion. . . .

"When I entered the marsh, which was intersected by wide ditches, not easy to cross, I could see several small flocks of ducks and mallards quietly sleeping

with their heads under their wings, on the banks of the water-courses. But they would not allow me to get a shot with any reasonable chance of hitting one of them—a wary old mallard generally keeping a good look out, or sleeping, like a Bristol man, with one eye open, and the other but half-shut. So, whenever I approached within a hundred yards of the flock, he was sure to give an alarm, and away he and his feathered companions flew, leaving me to try and steal a march on the next group ; which I found equally vigilant. At last I got a flying shot at a widowed duck, whose mate had probably been killed by some sporting French officer, or prowling Dutchman ; and bagging the bird as a seasonable addition to my salt rations, I returned in a sadly mud-bespattered condition to my companions. . . ."

This was the 18th December, and the nineteenth birthday of the young subaltern, who, after sharing his duck at dinner with the two other officers of the Light company, had to take command of an advanced picket on the Scheldt.

" As the day closed it became very dark and cold, with a fog fully equal in density to a London particular . . . and I had to perambulate the banks of the river throughout the long dreary hours of darkness. . . . The dense bluish vapour made it difficult to distinguish objects at the distance of a yard, and seemed to steam up from the river, and from the earth, and to roll down in misty wreaths from the sky. It was sufficiently humid to wet everything exposed to its influence. You could hear in the still hour of night the accumulated vapour drop, drop, drop, patter, patter, patter, from the branches of trees and bushes, and from the eaves of houses and barns, splashing

into the tiny pools made by its own prolonged dripping. It settled on the whiskers, and on the hair which was uncovered by the cap, and even dropped from them, or trickled down the face until every part became saturated with moisture. In short, that slow, insinuating foggy mist seemed to creep through the apparel, and spread its cold clammy touch over the whole body and limbs, clinging to everything like the honey blight on the leaves of the rose tree. . . .

"Visiting my sentries, patrolling and reconnoitring along the water side, and extending my observations to the next outpost on my right, the night wore away, and the morning dawned through the thick mist to my great delight; for it had been a night of much anxiety to me, not knowing exactly how or where the enemy's outposts were stationed, or what means of aggression they possessed. But as the whole upper part of the river was open to them, the greatest vigilance was necessary to guard against surprise.

"Soon after daylight had struggled through the murky atmosphere, I made a last and searching examination all round the picket station; and as everything appeared quiet, both on land and water, I marched my party back to the headquarters of my regiment. . . ."

No orders being received as to a move forward, the young chronicler had time to look about him, and comments on the extraordinary headdress worn by the women, which, he says, could not fail to arrest attention, since they were such as he had never seen save "in the pictures of Gabriel Metzu and other Dutch painters."

The town of Tholen, he tells us, was situated on a branch of the Scheldt, about three miles north-west

of Bergen op Zoom, and surrounded by a rampart and ditch. It appeared capable of making considerable resistance to an attacking force ; but the enemy had evacuated the place on the British landing, after spiking the guns and hurling them from the ramparts into the ditch. The population of the island seemed fairly numerous, as several towns were marked down in the existing English maps, such as Stavenisse and Westkerke, besides St. Martin's Dyke and Tholen—the two latter places being separated by a distance of seven miles.

Commenting scientifically on the relative levels of land and water in the Low Countries, we are told that " even in a perfect calm, the sea is more than six inches higher than the soil of Holland," necessitating the construction of dykes twenty feet high and twenty-five to thirty feet wide at the base ; and composed of tenacious clay, strengthened on the land side with planks and stones, and faced seawards with rushes, or the matting previously referred to.

" Goldsmith, in his poem of ' The Traveller,' alludes to the difference of level between sea and land in the elegant picture he has drawn of Holland :

> While the pent ocean rising o'er the pile,
> Sees an amphibious world beneath him smile ;
> The slow canal, the yellow blossom'd vale,
> The willow-tufted bank, the gliding sail,
> The crowded mart, the cultivated plain,
> Anew creation rescued from his reign."

V

Advance to Houver

"THE Army of Holland now presented a more complete organization than it had heretofore done. In addition to previous arrangement, a Light Division was formed, consisting of the 2nd Battalion, 35th, 52nd, and 95th Regiments—the last-named being a Rifle Corps. Sir Thomas Graham had determined to push this force across the river to invest Bergen op Zoom; and late at night on the 19th December we received an order to move at daybreak the next morning. Accordingly, at the appointed time, the Light Division was ready, but some delay occurred before we began to cross over the ferry which separates the island of Tholen from the mainland.

"I was appointed to command the rear-guard, and also ordered to protect the baggage, so I had to wait by the water-side until the Division had crossed over the river before the wagons could enter the ferry boat, or rather raft, which was pulled backwards and forwards by means of a rope fastened each side of the river. We subsequently found the passage of every ferry in Brabant was conducted on a similar plan. Though the operation of crossing was exceedingly tedious, it seemed well-adapted to the kind of traffic carried on. As it occupied upwards of ten minutes to

pull the raft across the river each way, the tide running at a rapid rate, it was late in the afternoon before I could get the baggage and stores over.

" The passage of the river at length accomplished, I posted my men in the way best suited to repel an attack, the enemy being only a mile from us on our right flank ; and we commenced our march along a road which was up to the knees in mud, and in some places the slush reached nearly up to the hips. The men requested permission to pull off their boots and stockings, in order that they might wade through the mire with greater facility. The sight of such an accumulation of dirt did not fail to remind me of the old Joe Miller anecdote, as related of an Irish recruit who, in one of the Duke of York's expeditions to Holland, on the order being given to form ' two deep,' exclaimed, ' Plaise your Honour, we're too deep already.' "

" We were not very long in passing through the horrid mud, and we found the road gradually improve as we advanced ; the horses moved the wagons at an accelerated rate, the soldiers as usual indulging in all kinds of rough jokes, one asking another if he did not find the road exceedingly hard when he got to the bottom of it, and so on.

" Notwithstanding every exertion to hasten on the drivers, it was long after dark before we arrived at the village of Moilen, our halting-place, and which is not more than four miles from the ferry we had crossed. Yet had we been from dreary morn till murky night in dragging our slow length over this short distance."

At Moilen, Austin handed over the charge of the convoy and sought a billet. Here, after a frugal repast in the dark, as there were no candles or light

of any kind to be had, the weary subaltern, placing his boots to dry at a fire, threw himself on a wooden bedstead and was soon sound asleep. He was aroused shortly, however, by bugles blaring, and had great difficulty in getting on his boots, which had "become as stiff and hard as the wooden shoes of the country."

Rushing out into the confused throng of men hurrying in every direction, it was some time before he could find the regimental alarm post in the dark. The firing still continued to the front, the force now being only two miles from Bergen op Zoom. When he arrived at his post he was at once selected to take out a section of the Light company and to proceed to the line of pickets, in order to ascertain the cause of the firing. He was to wait there until Major MacAlester, commanding the 35th, came up with further reinforcements.

Reaching his destination by a by-road, he was informed by the officer in command of the picket that, hearing a party of men moving on his right, he had fired into it, and suspected that the picket had killed and wounded several, as groans were heard after his men had ceased firing. Major MacAlester shortly after came up with reinforcements and, handing part of them over to Austin, directed him to visit the whole line of pickets, and to meet his C.O. subsequently at a prearranged spot. "Proceeding cautiously along highways and by-ways, from one outpost to another, until I had communicated with each one in turn, and penetrated along an outwork of Bergen op Zoom, which was undefended, I made my way in the dark to the appointed rendezvous, and there awaited the arrival of my commandant.

"In front of the position occupied by the advanced

posts, I could see a long dark line of breast-work, which showed in relief against the sombre sky above. Over the parapet of this work it was alleged numerous heads had been seen peeping, leaving no doubt that a strong body of the enemy was posted there. . . . After a brief consultation, and patrolling in the vicinity, it was determined to penetrate as far to our right as could be done with our small force. . . . We soon found ourselves among the outworks of Bergen op Zoom, but no enemy attempted to oppose our progress, and it was evident that the extensive fortifications in advance of the town had been abandoned, and the whole strength of the garrison concentrated on the town defences. . . . At length, just before the first grey streak of morn opened in the east, we discovered a compact body of men formed across the road and advancing on our rear. . . . Mounting on the parapet, the better to discover who or what these troops were, it soon became evident that their object was to cut off our retreat. I accordingly directed the two men with me to fire bang into them and then retire. The whole company, as soon as we had cleared their front, opened fire, when, after an exchange of a few shots without much damage to either party, the enemy gave way and was speedily out of sight. We did not consider it prudent to follow, as it was not possible to know the numbers we might have to encounter, or the difficulties to be surmounted, for we were quite unacquainted with the position and strength of the enemy close at hand. . . .

" Daylight soon became sufficiently clear to enable us to see distinctly every object around, and we now realized that we had got well into the outworks. . . . The trees recently growing in the vicinity we could

see had been cut down to make palisades and abattis, and every means to complete the defences of the town appeared provided for. . . .

"Fatigued with our night's duty, and in hopes to prevent the recurrence of future night alarms, we volunteered to occupy this part of the advance with the Light infantry; so, posting some of the company in a farm-house, which we observed a short distance in the rear, and establishing a picket in front on a road close to an entrenchment, with a deep and wide ditch, or river, running along its base, we protected an important point from surprise."

Bent on adding something to their scanty fare in this advanced position, the officers of the Light company immediately embarked on piscatorial operations in the stream alluded to above. "We made up a rude kind of fishing line, having some hooks in a pocket-book. Whether the day was too cold, or our want of neater tackle, or the absence of fish, or not having the proper bait, or all these things combined, it is not easy to say; but certain it is that we waited a weary time without being rewarded for our patience with a single nibble. How long we might have remained watching our line, I know not; but, benumbed with the cold, our occupation was cut short by two or three bullets, sent from a distant parapet, splashing close to our feet and practically assuring us that we fished in troubled waters. So, taking the hint, we packed up our clumsy tackle with all convenient speed, and rejoined our men at the advanced picket."

The next three nights were passed by our chronicler at the bivouac fire in the advanced position, or patrolling. During one of these nocturnal perambulations, he fell into a sand-pit, twelve or fourteen feet deep,

and was considerably shaken by the concussion. Round the watch-fires the men amused each other by "recounting the strangest adventures imaginable. Even the escapades of the renowned Baron Munchausen were tame in comparison to some of the exploits related."

On the morning of the 23rd December, Sir Thomas Graham, accompanied by two staff officers and Major MacAlester, arrived at the picket, and Lieutenant Austin was directed to escort them with a party of infantry to reconnoitre Bergen op Zoom. "Taking our course to the right we got on ground somewhat more elevated, and approached by the main road to within a few hundred yards of the town. From this higher point we could distinctly see the fortifications of the renowned fortress, with the detached works on the Scheldt side, and could form a correct estimate of their strength. . . . Directly we were observed, the troops in the last-named works assembled in great haste, and we could hear the drums beat to arms in the town, and in a few minutes all appeared in commotion. The Commander-in-Chief, after taking a survey of the place through his glass, and completing his observations, rode away at his usual rapid rate, having first directed me to retire and be cautious in case I was pursued by cavalry." The retirement was carried out, however, without molestation.

The British force was shortly afterwards joined by a party of Cossacks, "who established themselves on the main road, and posted a vidette near our advanced pickets. We placed but little reliance on these rude warriors, for we soon discovered that however useful they may be in keeping up the communication between different parts of an army, they are, as a military body,

the greatest rabble in Europe. A few shots invariably put them to flight; and as for attacking regular troops while unbroken, they never thought of such rashness, for with them the better part of valour is discretion. They wheel round their horses and fly at the first appearance of danger. Their chief use in the field is in harassing a retreating enemy, by cutting off stragglers and creating night alarms to the great discomfort of a fatigued opponent. They never, throughout the whole campaign, dared to break through the line of French outposts. Their action tended to prove that those who are least brave in battle are generally the most eager in pursuit; as village curs will chase a noble mastiff so long as he runs away from them, but if he stands at bay they turn and fly with precipitous haste. These remarks do not apply, however, to the Red Cossacks of the Guard. . . .

"The Cossacks are of predatory habits, a cruel horde of plunderers, preying alike on friends and foes, when they can rifle the former with any chance of escaping detection. They carry fire-arms, and very long lances, with formidable-looking sabres. They are a hardy people which the Czar is pleased to employ for the purpose of swelling the ranks of his army. The Don Cossacks, or Cossacks of the Don, which our party appeared to be, are compound creatures, being a mixture of at least four or five different races. . . . Platoff, who was with the Allied army in 1813, was their *Hetman*; but they have been deprived of their privileges by their Russian masters. Now they are mere serfs, like the rest of the tribes under the dominion of the Czar. They number about 700,000 and are spread over 3,000 square miles of country.

"A very erroneous opinion prevailed in England

respecting the Cossacks, who were generally considered as perfect heroes, instead of the unscrupulous marauders we found them to be. . . .

"We endeavoured to converse with this, the first party of Cossacks we had met; but our attempt was most unsatisfactory. We could get little from them but the word 'Inglise,' which they repeated as they pointed to their sabres, all of which appeared to be of Birmingham manufacture. One of their own officers told us that he thought the sight of our epaulettes, or flank company wings, would be too great a temptation for the Cossacks to resist, if they met with an opportunity where they could despoil the wearer of the costly ornaments without fear of detection; and that their lances might possibly prevent tales being told. Pleasant fellows, these same Cossacks, to campaign with! . . .

"The Light Division, consisting of about 1,100 men, had up to this time alone held the position before Bergen op Zoom; and when thus situated, with a deep and rapid river separating it from all support, Major MacAlester, on Sir Thomas Graham coming over to make a reconnaissance, inquired as to what was to be done in the event of being attacked by a very superior force. 'The best you can,' was the brief reply. With these not very satisfactory instructions, we prepared to do the best we could; but the duties, owing to the smallness of our force, were very harassing, and we were continually on the alert to prevent being taken at a disadvantage, for the enemy was very superior to us in numbers."

Late one afternoon shortly afterwards, an order was received by the Light Division to retire in the evening, leaving their bivouac fires burning. The army had

now all crossed from Tholen Island, and it was intended to move further into the country, the Light Division following as a rear-guard. Between 8 and 9 p.m. watch-fires were replenished and the Division retired slowly in rear of the army. "After a dreary march of some hours' duration, during which most of the men slept on their way, we arrived at Steenbergen, about 2 a.m.

"Those who know not what fatigue and want of rest are, may be incredulous as to thousands of men sleeping as they marched along the road, but such is, nevertheless, strictly correct. For myself, I can only say that, having had but one night's rest since landing on Tholen, I slept the greater part of the way. It is true that under such circumstances men do not sleep as soundly as if they were in bed, for the mind is kept on the stretch, and not quite insensible to what is passing around; but sleep they do, and if the foot strikes a clod of earth or a stone, the somnambulist is instantly aroused to a perfect waking state, the same as when shaken or disturbed from sleep in bed. . . .

"On arriving at Steenbergen a general halt was ordered. This town was formerly of some importance as a sea-port; but the tide has long ceased to flow within two miles of the place, the channel having become silted up. It is about six miles from Bergen op Zoom, and contains about 4,000 inhabitants. . . ."

Men and officers were literally littered down in any capacious buildings handy, and snatched a few hours' rest on straw scattered over the floor. Here, in their muddy boots and bespattered clothes they were as closely packed as "a layer of herrings in a barrel." The officers had to forage in the town, too, for their

breakfast next morning; in the midst of which foraging the bugles sounded for the march to continue.

"I was this day placed in command of the rear-guard composed of Light infantry, with directions to follow the baggage and stores, which were in charge of an officer's guard also . . . as there was some apprehension that an attack would be made on the convoy which followed the army."

The cold had now increased and the frost seemed about to set in with unusual severity. Yet no provision had been made to supply the men with warm clothing, and all suffered much from exposure in consequence. The wagons crawled along, some breaking through the ice on inundated parts of the road, and blocking it until extricated. A considerable time was also spent in ferrying the convoy across a river about half-way through the day's march. Eventually Oud Castel, the halting-place for the British troops, and distant only seven miles from Steenbergen, was entered when quite dark. It was Christmas Day; and Lieut. Austin's fare, he tells us, consisted of "ration salt junk, which was as hard and dark as old mahogany, and about as indigestible. . . . After my repast I threw off my jacket and boots, and turned into a bed made in a recess in the wall and shut in with folding doors, which, when kept closed, concealed all from view.

"We found this to be a very common mode of sleeping in most houses, and it is a much warmer couch in winter than on a bedstead placed out in a room. When the doors of these bed-closets are closed, and covered with the same kind of paper as the walls, which in most respectable houses is the case, the sitting-room presents no appearance of its

being used as a sleeping apartment also. But at best it is a dirty contrivance to economize space, and the want of ventilation must act most decidedly on the sanitary condition of such narrow confined cribs. . . .

"Ever since landing, our men had conducted themselves with great propriety, but at Oud Castel they practised a fraud upon the shop-keepers which required severe measures to repress. Hitherto, the inhabitants had in most instances freely taken our English coins at their full nominal amount, although a good deal depreciated in value by the friction they had undergone during the lengthened time they had been in circulation, the people relying implicitly on our good faith for its being sterling money. Shillings, sixpences, and three-shilling tokens, as much worn and as smooth as if they had never borne the impress of the King's head on them, were taken without hesitation. Taking advantage of the confidence which the people reposed in our honesty, some of the soldiers had taken the pewter buttons off their great-coats, and skilfully removed the shanks from them, at the same time imparting a polish that made them closely resemble the worn surface of the genuine shillings. To such an extent had this fraud been practised that a shop-keeper who requested us to enter his premises, and who inquired if these polished buttons were silver, had, in the course of the morning, taken nineteen of the spurious coins in exchange for the commodities he dealt in.

"On our becoming aware of the fraud, we ordered the Light company to fall in with their great-coats on: and it is with regret that I record the fact, but truth compels me to say, that there was not a dozen buttons remaining on the coats of the whole company.

The shop-keeper was sent for, and he identified one man in particular, who had passed several of the counterfeits at his shop. A drum-head court martial was immediately assembled, and the crime clearly proved against the accused, who was accordingly sentenced to receive corporal punishment. This sentence was instantly carried into execution in a Roman Catholic chapel occupied by about two hundred of our soldiers.

" The punishment of this man was much regretted by my brother-officers and myself, for he had been a servant to the lamented Sir John Moore, and had previously borne an excellent character ; but it was considered necessary to make an example, and he was the only man identified, so suffered for all concerned in the fraud. The only palliation that can be offered for our soldiers committing this offence is that they were without a farthing of money, no pay having been issued to either officers or men on the 24th of the month, as had been usual on the home stations ; and also that the bread furnished to the army was of the worst possible description."

The French army at this very time were served with the best wheaten bread ; whereas that supplied the English was made of rye of inferior quality, " which was so coarsely ground that it resembled a conglomeration of sawdust and soot, being almost as black as ebony, and withal so unpalatable that, unless under the pressure of absolute starvation, I could never eat an ounce of it. . . . This wretched food was considered good enough for British soldiers to live on and to make long marches on, as well as to endure fatigue of various kinds."

As regards punishments, we are told that, " at this

period no discretion was left to courts martial as to the sentence awarded; for the only recognized modes of punishment in the army were death or the cat-o'-nine-tails. The loathsome, savage punishment of flogging was, therefore, resorted to on every trifling occasion, and the amount of pain inflicted for trivial faults was truly frightful. There was scarcely a regiment in the British army that had not once a week its punishment parade." Frequently, we are told, little or no difference was made between "an inadvertent transgressor of military law and the hardened habitual offender, both alike having their backs lacerated by the ignominious whip. . . . It must be remembered, however, that the ranks of the army were contaminated with the dregs of society, men of bad character almost outnumbering the well-conducted soldiers. I recall on one occasion three hundred men being taken from the different prisons, and sent to swell the ranks of the 14th Regiment, of which Sir Harry Calvert, the Adjutant-General, was Colonel."

On the 27th December, the Light Division received a sudden order to march to the village of Houver, about six miles distant from Oud Castel in the direction of Breda. Here the diarist was billeted, with his two brother-officers of the Light company, on a highly respectable family, which consisted of "Mynheer, and his wife, with a son twenty years of age, and a pretty daughter of seventeen." The three officers of the Light company apparently soon won the good opinion of the family, one and all of whom did everything in their power to make their guests comfortable. So much so that the youthful Austin says, "Had I been their son instead of their compulsory guest, I could not have experienced greater kindness. . . .

" One evening during our sojourn at Houver, a party of those ready reckoners, the Cossacks, entered the village and established themselves in one of the best houses in it. No sooner had they entered than they intimated in a way not to be misunderstood that it was their pleasure to regale themselves. Accordingly, everything in the shape of meat and drink that the place could supply was spread out before them, to which they helped themselves in a way that would have astonished those who possess the squeamish digestion of fashionable people. While the Cossacks were feasting and drinking to repletion, some young natives of the village, incited by curiosity, entered the house to see them at their repast. . . . A friend of our host's son, who was also present, pulled out his watch about ten o'clock to ascertain the time, when one of the Cossacks immediately snatched it from him . . . deposited it in his own pocket, and remarked, with a roguish leer at his victim, ' 'Tis goote broder.'

" During the same night I was roused from my slumber by our kind old hostess pulling me by the arm and, by signs, urging me to rise. I instantly jumped off the bed, and was about to draw on my boots, but the old lady, light in hand, hurried me away . . . and on entering the parlour I found three Cossacks already there. These fellows were doubtless in search of plunder or bent on other nefarious proceedings. My two brother-officers followed close after me, when the Cossacks instantly assumed a respectful air, which in all probability would have been different had I been alone. These marauders were never restrained in their actions by an inconvenient sense of moral obligations

. . . and Byron has truly said of these savages,

> The only way to argue with Cossacks,
> Is to apply the argument to their backs.

"The Cossacks, as an excuse for their nocturnal intrusion, made us understand by signs that they were looking for a British officer from whom to obtain a memorandum that they had duly patrolled to the village. To get rid of them quietly we gave them what they desired and they departed; but had we not been in the house at the time, its inmates would have received the grossest treatment from their unseasonable visitors.

"No sooner had the Cossacks left the house than our hostess threw open one of the cupboard-like bed places in the parlour, and revealed to us the cause of her solicitude, her pretty daughter, now laughing with delight; but who a moment before had been in the utmost dread of the ruthless intruders we had just expelled. Her mother at the same time shed tears of joy at the deliverance from uncouth savages, whose evil deeds had obtained for them an unenviable and disgraceful notoriety. . . .

"Several times during our stay at Houver, I endeavoured to shoot some of the wood-pigeons which frequented the wooded portions of the country in the vicinity; but their extreme shyness ensured their safety. And as for the wild geese which, in the foggy mornings, abounded in the marshy grounds in almost incredible numbers, to follow them was truly a wild-goose chase. They generally ranged themselves by thousands at a time along the margins of the ditches which separated the meadows; and they would allow me to approach within a hundred yards or so

when, on the alarm being given, the whole flock would rise at once, making a noise which might be heard at a considerable distance, and imparting an idea of their immense numbers."

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VI

Capture of Merxem ; Austin rescues the Duke of Clarence

"THE expedition from England had now all arrived, and the chief command of the forces concentrated in the Low Countries having been given to Sir Thomas Graham, with the rank of General in Holland, the troops under Major-General Gibbs became merged in the general arrangement of the assembled Army of Holland—the Major-General retaining the command of a Division. Sir Thomas Graham was popular with the troops, so that every individual man placed implicit confidence in him as a brave and skilful commander. He had already in the Peninsula, under Wellington, earned a reputation that made every soldier feel proud of his general.

"In accordance with the plan of the campaign, General Gibbs moved with his brigade from Williamstadt on the 28th December to form a junction with the other portions of the army. Owing to a thaw the roads were in a very bad state, being knee-deep in mud in some places. The fatigue this occasioned to the men may be easily imagined. Toiling along with their heavy cumbersome knapsacks and load of accoutrements, they only accomplished ten miles

on the first day. . . . The next day they took up their allotted position, and henceforward they became incorporated with the main army. . . ."

A brief period of relative inactivity followed, and some officers employed it in making excursions through the surrounding district. On the 30th December, Lieut. Austin proceeded in the direction of Breda, the capital of Dutch Brabant. The town had recently been taken by the Prussians and Cossacks through a clever stratagem. The manner of its capture was thus: A small force of Prussians, and a party of Cossacks, approached the gates and sent in a flag of truce, announcing themselves as the advanced guard of the Grand Allied Army; and in the usual form summoned the Commandant to surrender the place. The French garrison, not being prepared to resist a serious attack, instantly evacuated the town, the Prussians and Cossacks entering at the north gate whilst the French hurried out at the opposite one. . . .

"On entering Breda," Austin tells us, "our first intention was to ascend the spire of the church . . . which we had seen long before we arrived at the gates . . . as it is 360 feet high. From the top there is a very extensive view, commanding a prospect of Antwerp to the south, at a distance of thirty miles; and Rotterdam, about twenty-six miles to the north-west.

"Before, however, we could accomplish our design to ascend the spire, the French, having discovered the ruse that had been played on them by the Prussians and Cossacks, suddenly advanced from Antwerp to try and regain possession of the town. Fortunately, reinforcements of Prussians had arrived, and the

citizens appeared zealous in lending their aid, so that preparations were instantly made to offer a vigorous resistance.

"Being fairly in for it, my brother-officer and myself offered our services to the Prussian commandant, and we accordingly joined the troops on the ramparts. The French, who had advanced rapidly and unexpectedly, at once opened a heavy fire on the place, which they kept up with great spirit for about three hours. But after an ineffectual, though gallant, attempt to force the gates, finding the garrison more numerous and better prepared than was expected, they retired, having suffered a considerable loss.

"As it was getting late in the day when the contest terminated we became anxious to return to Houver; so, after receiving the thanks of the Prussian officers for the part we had taken in repelling the attack, we hurried out of the town. . . . Soon after leaving Breda we met a regiment of Hussars of our German Legion, which had been sent to ascertain the cause of the firing; but before their arrival the enemy had retired. . . .

"When we reached Houver we found the troops under arms and expecting an immediate attack; but when we related the occurrences at Breda, and reported the retreat of the French, all returned to their allotted quarters. . . . The small force which had appeared before Houver, the extreme left of the British position, could have only been a strong patrol sent to ascertain that all was quiet there whilst the attack on Breda was being carried on. . . .

"At the time of our visit to Breda, some other British officers, but strangers to us, had just passed

the gates on their return to their regiment when the enemy appeared before the place. They escaped capture by lying down on the bottom of the light wagon they travelled in, the driver placing straw over them, under which they lay concealed, not daring to move hand or foot. And in this way they may be said to have passed through the French army. . . .

"The church at Houver was occupied by 250 of our soldiers, who kept up a large fire in the middle aisle to warm themselves by. All the seats in the edifice were by degrees committed to the flames, but no other damage was done to the building. The practice of troops occupying the churches and other places of worship was not at all unusual during the war; and though it may be considered by some persons as an unpardonable desecration to convert sacred edifices into barracks, or to use them for military purposes, necessity must justify the act. . . .

"Early in the morning of the 9th January 1814, we were ordered to march to Rozendaal, a clean neatly-built town situated about eight miles from Houver, and six from Bergen op Zoom. The town was now only occupied by a strong cavalry picket of the enemy: and it was supposed that by a rapid advance the said picket might be surprised and made prisoners. Accordingly, I was selected, as being a good marcher, to command the party of Light infantry destined to accomplish this feat of arms. . . .

"The plan proposed was, in my humble opinion, not a judicious one, for French troops are generally too much on the alert to be easily caught napping, or decoyed into a trap. Had I been left to my own free

action and allowed to cross the country, avoiding the roads, the plan might have succeeded . . . but to move along the road in full daylight, even at the utmost speed, was a certain way of being discovered and defeating the object in view. However, as I was honoured with the charge of the enterprise, I determined to do my utmost to ensure success. . . ."

But the birds had flown; and when the division came up, about forty minutes after the entry of Austin and his party into Rozendaal, the order was given, "Billet yourselves as you stand," which meant the troops were to occupy the houses nearest at hand. Commenting on this, the young chronicler writes: "Happily for the people of England such invasion (twelve or fourteen soldiers intruded as guests in a private family) of their domestic privacy is unknown to them; for the rough tide of war has ceased to roll over their country for many generations, and they know only of its horrors, and the sufferings of the inhabitants exposed to its hardships, by the reports of others. . . .

"No sooner had we established ourselves at Rozendaal than it was ascertained that the enemy occupied, with a force of fourteen hundred men, the irregular and scattered village of Calmpthaut, distant about eleven or twelve miles. . . . Directly this was known it was determined to attempt a surprise; and we accordingly received a sudden order on the evening of the 11th January for the instant march of eleven hundred men of the Light Division. . . ."

The night was an intensely cold one. "Little Tommy" was again placed in charge of the advanced

guard, and proceeding cautiously along the road soon came upon an enemy watch-fire burning brightly inside the fence separating the fields from the road. Several others were passed as the party advanced, from all of which the enemy had hastily retired in the direction of Calmpthaut.

"Alongside the fires we found one or two contrivances for the comfort of the officer in command of each picket, such as we in our proud ignorance had never dreamt of adopting. One of those contrivances was in the form of a little cubby house, made with a number of small bundles of straw placed on end in two rows, about two feet apart, with the upper ends of the bundles leaning inwards till they met at the top and resembled in shape the roof of a house. Into this straw snuggery, which was close alongside the fire, the officer must have crept or crawled, and passed the night, if not comfortably, at least with less suffering from the cold than those exposed to its benumbing effects. Often have I felt my limbs, after a night's exposure, as stiff and the joints as rigid as though the frost had penetrated my frame and frozen the bones. . . ."

Slowly and cautiously the force marched until a piece of waste land was reached close to the village of Calmpthaut. Here the troops formed up in order of battle, expecting to be attacked; but as no enemy appeared, Austin was directed to push forward into the village and seek out the enemy. This he did with ten men, and traversed the place from end to end. He saw nothing of the enemy, however, and duly reported the fact to General Gibbs. The troops then passed through the village and formed up on the margin of Braeschaet Heath, where they remained till daylight.

They then learnt that the enemy had retreated in the direction of the *chausée* leading from Amsterdam to Antwerp and Brussels.

On returning to Calmpthaut, the troops found ovens in full swing for supplying rations of bread for fifteen hundred men, which the French had ordered but never enjoyed. "An immediate onslaught was made on the ovens and the delicious warm white bread was distributed . . . two excellent wheaten loaves being brought to me as my share of the spoil. This was a most seasonable supply and quite a treat, for the bread furnished to us by our commissariat was . . . scarcely fit for human food ; and often have I seen the soldiers as they marched along throw their loaves of villainous trash over the fences by the roadside, and go without bread rather than eat the nauseous compound, which produced dysentery and other ailments. . . ."

Scarcely, however, had the troops commenced their breakfast on the smoking hot bread and cold salt pork, when they were suddenly startled by hearing a furious cannonade to their left, which sounded, in the clear frosty air, as though it issued from the very centre of the scattered force. This caused a general rush to alarm posts, where the troops awaited an expected attack on the open heath outside the village. The firing of both artillery and musketry increased in intensity, but no enemy appeared. Lieut. Austin was again sent off to ascertain, with a party of Light infantry, the cause of all the turmoil.

"Passing from the heath through some enclosures and an angle of the village, I proceeded with my party along a road leading in the direction of the

firing . . . which I found was upwards of a mile distant from Calmpthaut. Sending back an orderly with a report to this effect, I kept on in the direction of the tumult, till we came in sight of the contending parties. These consisted of the French troops who had retired before us from Calmpthaut, and a body of Prussian infantry which had advanced along the main road, and were thus brought into collision with each other. . . .

" I saw at a glance that the enemy had the advantage of position and the best of the fight. They were defending a bridge over a narrow and somewhat rapid stream which, notwithstanding the frost, was not yet wholly frozen over. The Prussians were endeavouring to force the passage of this bridge, and the enemy defending it with the utmost determination. In vain did the Prussians precipitate themselves upon the enemy three times and attempt to force that narrow passage, but their ranks were mowed down by the rapid well-directed fire of artillery and incessant shower of musket balls, which swept along the road.

" When I arrived within good musketry range, I ordered my men to line a fence as much on the enemy's flank as the nature of the ground would permit, and then we opened a brisk fire on the foremost ranks defending the bridge. The Prussians seeing this timely aid made another vigorous attack on the bridge, but without success, for the French were too firmly established to be driven from their position by the force brought to bear against it. After this last repulse the Prussians retreated in great haste, but in tolerable good order ; and I retired with my small party to Calmpthaut, where we remained until the following day."

The cold was now intense, and the British force suffered greatly from the cutting wind that blew across the heath, whilst waiting to advance, as there was some delay in the early morning before the columns were set in motion in the direction of the main road to Antwerp. Again in command of the advanced guard, Austin soon arrived at the bridge where he had seen the Prussians defeated the previous day. The French retired, however, on the approach of the British, and the diarist had an opportunity of examining the position where the contest had occurred.

" Many of the trees on either side of the road were shattered and broken by cannon balls, and the road furrowed by the fire of artillery ; while in the small stream which crossed the road the naked and mutilated bodies of four or five hundred men could be seen lying in every conceivable position. These men were slain in the contest of the previous day, and had been plundered and denuded of their clothes either by the enemy or the Dutch Boers living in the vicinity. It was a sad spectacle to see so many human beings sprawling like a parcel of defunct frogs in a ditch. But such is war."

A short distance on, to the great delight of all, they " beheld the tall and beautiful spire of Antwerp Cathedral, fourteen miles distant rising across this dreary-looking plain like a ship's mast at sea, while a considerable body of French troops defiled in the mid-distance, and appeared inclined to dispute our further progress. We accordingly moved forward and took up a position on the open heath with our left flank extending to the enclosed country, which bordered the wide-spreading plain that takes its

name from the small town of Braeschaet. Some German Legion Hussars were pushed forward, and a party of Light infantry, under my command, was sent to the front to reconnoitre. We had not been many minutes detached from the main body before we saw that the enemy still approached. I sent back an orderly to report on their numbers, etc., and had just begun to exchange shots with their advanced skirmishers when, seeing our preparations to engage them, they hastily retired before our main force could bring them to action. . . .

" All our men had been in a high state of excitement in expectation of an engagement, but when it was known that the French had declined the contest much disappointment was felt. . . . As it became known from information received that the enemy would attempt to reinforce the garrison of Bergen op Zoom, our object was to frustrate any attempt of the kind. Therefore, as the troops of the enemy we had seen on the heath were probably destined for that service, it was determined by a rapid march to occupy Capelle, a small town situated between Antwerp and Bergen op Zoom ; and thus cut off the communication between the two places. . . ."

The troops obtained such shelter as was possible in the barns and farm-houses about Capelle, the Boers (or farmers) having to admit soldiers into their dwellings at the discretion of the officers. The Boers were usually found civil and obliging, but they were mostly so poor that they could provide little to which Englishmen were accustomed, beyond mealy potatoes. Their own family dinner consisted chiefly of a large bowl

of small potatoes, whilst the larger ones were given to the pigs and cows. With the addition of very dark coarse rye bread, this constituted the daily fare of the Boers. Butter was made by these rustics, but they used little themselves, as it was sent for sale to the adjacent towns. Tobacco was grown on most farms, and eagerly exchanged by the soldiers for ration meat. All the Boers, we are told, were inveterate smokers. "After every meal each Boer brought forth his pipe, and charged it from his well-filled pouch of home-grown tobacco, first cutting it into small pieces and rolling it well in his hands. For what particular purpose this rolling process was adopted I, not being initiated in the mysteries of smoking, could never understand. . . .

"The severity of the weather did not retard our movements, but the French, in order to impede our advance, had in some places opened the sluices communicating with the tidal river Scheldt, and partially inundated the country: and as the inundation rose, successive layers of ice were formed *stratum super stratum*, with intervening sheets of water. In crossing these inundated tracts the top layer of ice, being the last formed, was not always sufficiently strong to bear the weight of a numerous party of men. It would therefore break under the pressure of the incumbent body and let those on it down to the next layer, which not unfrequently also yielded; so that we had to wade through a slushy mixture of mud, ice and water. On emerging from this unpleasant kind of semi-immersion and arriving on firmer ground, or more compact ice, the trousers would instantly freeze, causing considerable discomfort, and even suffering of no ordinary description, especially when no oppor-

tunity of drying the saturated garment presented itself for many hours, or, as sometimes happened, for a whole day and night. . . .

" At this period our supplies of fresh meat were in the shape of sundry lean and ancient cows, which were driven in the rear of the columns on the march. On the word being given to ' Halt and dine,' the bony skinny kine were at once dispatched, and cut up in a most unbutcherly, but most expeditious, manner. This done, the men then collected together bundles of brushwood, heath and grass, which they ignited ; when, holding on a pointed stick the still warm and quivering morsel of flesh over the blazing flickering fire, they endeavoured to cook it by that means. But sometimes the fuel collected for the purpose refused to burn, when most of the men, becoming impatient at the slow action of the miserable fire, devoured their portions before they were half-cooked. For my own part, as I could never fancy underdone meat, even when pressed by extreme hunger, and having nothing of the cannibal in my nature, my delicate tit-bit was generally as black as soot from the smoke of the flickering fire before I could venture to eat it ; and it would have puzzled anyone to have rightly guessed the nature of the morsel when placed before them."

But, as the writer very pertinently inquires, " How could men without fire, without cooking utensils, on a wild heath, and with only sixty minutes allowed in which to kill the cattle, to flay them, to cut them up, divide them up into small portions, cook and eat their dinners, apply scientific methods ? . . .

" Our rapid march on Capelle had effected the desired result by preventing the force we had seen

on Braeschaet Heath getting into Bergen op Zoom. Having so far frustrated the enemy's plan, the 35th Regiment continued to occupy Capelle during the night of the 12th January, when other regiments arrived and relieved them from that duty."

Next morning the 35th were directed, with other corps of the Light Division and some Highlanders, to cross the heath and attack troops collected by the enemy at Merxem, a village about three-quarters of a mile from Antwerp, and covering the approach to that city by the *chausée* leading from Amsterdam. Progress was somewhat retarded by the deep snow, but having traversed the heath the force moved in two columns along the *chausée* towards the enemy, who confidently awaited the British attack.

"The *chausée* is wide and convenient, the centre only paved and somewhat raised. Stately rows of beech, elm, and oak trees grace each side of this splendid highway. . . . After proceeding some distance along the high road, the column in which I formed a humble unit was directed to make a detour to the right, for the purpose of dislodging a strong body of the enemy who occupied a moat-surrounded chateau, situated on a road on our right flank. . . .

"Skirmishers were thrown out, and soon engaged with the enemy stationed in the woods and plantations around the old chateau. Pressing them closely, they steadily retired; and as we of the Light company crossed the ice-covered moat at one point, the column of attack cheered, and forced their way over the narrow drawbridge, which formed the only regular approach to the building. Attacked vigorously on two sides

at the same moment, the enemy beat a precipitate retreat. So nimble were they in their movements that we could only secure two prisoners, some ammunition and a few muskets. . . .

" The Duke of Clarence (afterwards King William the Fourth) now joined the advanced troops, and when the enemy first opened fire on us and some casualties had occurred, my commanding officer, Major MacAlester, addressing the Royal Duke, said, ' May I entreat your Royal Highness not to remain here, but to retire a little distance until the general rejoins the brigade.' The general had been sent for by Sir Thomas Graham.

" ' Retire ! certainly not,' the Duke replied, and continued to go on with the troops.

" Following up our advantage, we drove the enemy from fence to fence, at each of which strong parties endeavoured to make a stand and check further pursuit. But in vain ; for our men had them on the move, and kept so close to their work, that to rally effectually was impossible. . . . We at length came nearly in a line with Merxem, a suburb of Antwerp. Here we found the enemy had prepared a determined resistance. Several field pieces were brought forward to command the road, so that a sweeping fire was maintained for some time ; but the British skirmishers, getting on their flanks, attacked them with great animation ; and those on the road pressing forward at the same time, the enemy was compelled to relinquish his advanced position. . . .

" In this operation, during a rush on the guns, a cannon ball grazed my left side ; but it did not inflict more than a superficial wound. Fortunately, I was in the act of waving my cap on high to cheer

the men on, or my arm must have been carried away had it been in its more usual position by my side. . . .

"Whilst engaged in clearing the enemy from the enclosures round the village of Merxem, the Duke of Clarence accompanied the Light troops during a part of the time, and H.R.H. frequently aided the men in getting through the intricate fences which occasionally obstructed their progress. Being the senior subaltern of the Light company, my post was on the extreme left of the skirmishers which covered the advance of the right column of attack. When forcing the enemy from hedge-row to hedge-row, behind each of which they made a stand and fired heavily, the Duke of Clarence scrambled through a fence some little distance on my left. Turning my head in that direction, I observed a party of the enemy issuing from a house and garden with the evident intention of capturing His Royal Highness. Seeing that delay might prove dangerous, I desired such of the men of different units as had got through the fence to follow me. This was promptly done, and then, with about a dozen of my own men, one or two of the 78th Highlanders, and a few of the 95th Rifles, we moved against the party. It had by this time approached to within twelve or fourteen yards of the Royal Duke, and had already intercepted his retreat, and were about to surround him. Had he attempted to run he would certainly have been shot. My object was to get at the fellows with the bayonet without firing; but when the enemy fired on my party and killed a soldier of the 78th and a rifleman, the fire was returned and a rush made at them.

" After a brief contest with the bayonet, the enemy fled with precipitation, throwing away their arms in order to facilitate their flight. Brief as the contest had been their loss amounted to eight killed, several wounded and eleven prisoners. Among the wounded was a fine soldierly-looking fellow, who had received a grievous wound, a bullet having entered just above the nape of his neck and passed out in front between the mouth and nose, carrying away the upper front teeth in its passage. The man fell when struck, but quickly rose again and endeavoured to escape to the gardens at the back of the village. One of the men was, however, too brisk for him and made him a prisoner.

" On speaking to the unfortunate man and seeing the nature of his wound, it appeared marvellous to me that he could stand and walk after receiving such a frightful injury. Our men, with the usual kind feeling of soldiers to an unfortunate captive, offered him undiluted ' Hollands ' from their canteens. Some of the proffered spirit he was able to drink, but the hemorrhage from his wound nearly suffocated him. As he was able to walk, I passed him at once to the rear, in charge of one of our men who was slightly wounded in the arm, in order that he might obtain the surgical aid he so much required. What became of the poor fellow I could never learn, but I should suppose his wound must have proved fatal. . . .

" It need scarcely be mentioned that the Duke of Clarence, who evinced great coolness and courage throughout this affair, was well pleased at the promptitude displayed in going to his rescue. One of the Highlanders engaged with me subsequently obtained

his commission for his bravery on the occasion . . . but promotion did not come to me from the north south, east or west."

We are informed in a footnote that, "absurd paragraphs appeared in some English publications relative to the miraculous escape of the Royal Duke during this day's operations. One writer represented that His Royal Highness's coat was perforated by five bullet holes; another, more moderate, made the number only three. For my part, though quite ready to testify to the gallantry and pluck of the Prince, who was as much exposed to the enemy's fire as anyone, I must say that, although I was close to him, I did not see the bullet holes. Bullets are not such respecters of persons as to perforate coats of royal personages without touching bone or muscle."

A sharp engagement followed to expel the enemy from the village of Merxem, the brunt of our losses falling on the 78th Highlanders. Driven from the village, the French were pursued by the Light infantry some distance towards Antwerp. About 180 of the enemy were captured whilst attempting a short cut across ice which gave way beneath their weight: and the "recall" shortly afterwards put an end to the pursuit.

Later, a fresh force of the enemy was observed in position. The Light infantry brigade moved against it and dispersed it with artillery fire. "We were led to consider this force in our front as the remnant of the old Irish Brigade, and hearing one or two unmistakable oaths uttered as they withdrew from the dyke our conjectures were probably correct as to their nationality.

"We were now within four hundred yards of eighteen or nineteen sail of the line moored close alongside each other in the basins of Antwerp, and we could also see several other ships of war lying at anchor in the Scheldt; and nothing appeared wanting but rockets and shells to enable us to destroy all these ships—the last remnants of the French navy." . . .

Great was the surprise of the British troops at this juncture, to receive a volley from the rear. Our men with suppressed voices exclaimed, "We are surrounded; the enemy are behind us."

"A strong body of troops was approaching from behind, and the position appeared critical, for a superior force of the enemy lay in front. Rear ranks were turned about to meet this new onslaught, and a party of German Legion Hussars was dispatched to ascertain who this fresh enemy might be. They returned presently with the information that they were Prussians who had mistaken our grey great-coats for those of French troops. We had accordingly been treated to a shower of spent bullets which came pattering like hail amongst our ranks, and wounded several officers and men. . . . Had my own nose been a very long one, it would have suffered on this occasion, for I felt the 'whizz' of a bullet in unpleasant proximity to it. . . . Fortunately, the mistake was discovered in time to prevent a serious collision."

The Prussians also nearly brought about an action with the 52nd, who were ordered to relieve the 78th and 95th in Merxem. As the 52nd entered the village from the fields, a Prussian regiment met them; and each supposing the other to be the enemy were on

the verge of attacking when the mistake was discovered.

"These mistakes of the Prussians were occasioned by their desultory mode of attack, and their commencing an action at too great a distance—a method practised by several continental armies, and resulting in a great waste of ammunition, and the loss of energy too soon expended, and which does not possess one countervailing advantage. I have seen Austrian troops commence firing with old flint muskets at an enemy six or seven hundred yards distance from them. . . .

"No sooner had the Prussians ascertained how affairs stood than they began to collect and plunder the French knapsacks scattered over the field in every direction. Our men had been kept so tight in hand that few of them had opportunities of helping themselves to the property of the slain. . . .

"When the enemy had been completely driven from Merxem, Sir Thomas Graham entered the village accompanied by the Duke of Clarence. . . . They ascended the church steeple to the belfry, but a shot or two from the enemy striking the steeple, and others likely to follow, the Duke and Sir Thomas descended to a place of greater security. Not before, however, they had obtained a good view of the French fleet lying moored in the docks of Antwerp, and which fleet appeared as if about to fall into our possession. To destroy the ships seemed a task of easy accomplishment, provided we could hold the position now occupied, within four hundred yards of the basins, until the guns, rockets and stores arrived. No one who saw the fleet huddled together in closely arranged tiers, with top-masts struck, and some of the rigging

removed, could doubt our ability to destroy it as soon as our battering train arrived, although the ships' decks were covered with a considerable quantity of mould and turf."

VII

Retirement from before Antwerp

"IT is with regret that I record an act of atrocious cold-blooded cruelty perpetrated by a Prussian soldier, which it is to be hoped may be considered as an isolated case, not as a general characteristic of his countrymen. After the village of Merxem had been carried by assault, such of the French wounded soldiers as were able crawled to the side of the street, in order to avoid being trampled on in the confusion incidental to scenes of the kind, as well as to support themselves against the houses on either side of the road. One of these unfortunates had been pounced upon by a Prussian, who had come up after the action was over, and had busied himself in rifling all the Frenchmen he could find, whether dead or alive. After helping himself to such articles as he fancied, he demanded the shoes which the wounded man wore. The poor fellow naturally demurred to taking the shoes off his feet. Words ensued which ended in the ruffianly Prussian bayoneting the ill-fated Frenchman.

"Those British soldiers who witnessed the horrible deed could scarcely be restrained from inflicting summary justice on the wretch who had been guilty of the foul act. Nor would it have caused much regret had this been done on the instant; but as such interference might have involved the British in a serious misunder-

standing with our Allies, it was thought prudent to restrain the men. On another occasion my sabre fortunately turned aside a vicious bayonet thrust which an infuriated drunken Prussian made at a wounded French officer.

" So incensed were the French and Prussians against each other, that no opportunity was lost by either of exhibiting the mortal enmity they cherished in their breasts. No doubt the Prussians had a long and heavy reckoning to settle with the French for the oppressions committed by them after the defeat of the Prussians at Jena in 1806, more especially as the grinding measures carried out by Davout's Corps was still fresh in recollection. The day of vengeance had arrived, and they were determined to make the most of it. . . .

" During this day's operations, our regimental dog was wounded. Most regiments in the British army possess a pet of some kind or other—sometimes difficult to imagine for what qualities chosen, unless some of them, to use an Irishism, are selected for their beautiful ugliness. . . . Our Light company prided themselves in the possession of a rough terrier, whose fighting qualities and indomitable courage had won their admiration and affection. This dog was originally from Bristol, and had attached himself to the soldiers, whom he accompanied on all occasions. On the morning of the 13th January 1814, he, as usual, had advanced with the skirmishers, who were well up to their opponents. The dog, greatly excited, was leaping up at the muskets as they were discharged ; and then, whenever he saw a bullet strike through the snow, he rushed at the spot and began to scratch with all his might ; but as the missiles came thick and fast ' Tickler ' was completely bewildered, running from

one bullet hole to another. At length a ball struck him down, and it was thought the 'Light Bob's' pet was killed. But in a short time he was enabled to get up and walk, when it was found that the bullet had wounded him over the right eye, and slightly injured the bone. The ball had struck the dog in a slanting direction, and therefore had not penetrated the skull. . . . As may be imagined, the men became more attached to their canine friend than ever, a friend who had shared in their dangers and privations. But he was not allowed to go into action again."

"As the evening set in there was a solemnity about the scene which was most impressive to me. The wide expanse of snow-covered ground that spread around us, with the slain lying scattered about on the spots where they had fallen, and appearing as dark points on the white snow. The stillness of the neighbouring village, from which the inhabitants had fled during the conflict. The only sounds which broke on the ear were the low half-suppressed groans of the wounded, who were now being placed in hospital wagons for conveyance to a place of shelter, and where assistance could be rendered to them. . . .

"Dead horses were lying about with their limbs stiffly frozen, while the crimson stream that had issued from their distended nostrils had tinted the snow around. Men with reddened eyes, and flushed cheeks begrimed with gun-powder and smoke gather round our fire. The cheers, the yells, the imprecations which re-echoed through the air in the tumult of action had died away; and though all about us was silent and solemn, a solitary shot might occasionally be heard in the darkness. This arose from the enemy's stragglers, who had concealed themselves for a time

and were now endeavouring to escape, hotly pursued by those who had seen them break cover. The pursuers usually first call on the fugitives to surrender, a summons sometimes answered by a whizzing bullet, which was sure to elicit a ball in return."

"We had not long kindled our bivouac fire, and daylight began to fade away, when we perceived the main body of our small army retiring; so that the 35th, 52nd, and 95th regiments, which were in advance with a few Prussians, alone remained in position. These troops were left to cover the retreat, and to check any attempt of the enemy to make a forward movement. . . .

"Soon after 8 p.m. the order for us to retire was given. The 52nd regiment, which had moved into Merxem when the main body retreated, evacuated the village at the same time that we left our position on its right. . . . At first the retreat was conducted silently and slowly, but as no enemy appeared, the pace was accelerated and the men allowed to converse until the main body was overtaken. . . ."

At a small town, whose name the chronicler forgot, the entire force halted for a time, the men being hastily allotted to any available buildings, and obtaining food whence they could.

"I sallied forth in quest of something to eat, for my appetite rebelled against longer abstinence; but there was very little prospect of appeasing it. The divisions which had retired earlier in the day had, like a swarm of locusts, cleared up every edible thing in their way. In vain I tried first one house and then another, but all were full of soldiers. Groping my way hither and thither in the dark, tumbling over all sorts of things every instant, and getting into all kinds of queer out-

of-the-way places . . . I determined to try my fortune at some distance beyond the precincts of the village. Wandering on in the dark I found myself in front of a gloomy-looking mansion. I approached it, knocked at the door, and was at once admitted by an elderly female; but whilst I was making my wants known to her, a door suddenly opened and revealed to my astonished vision the Duke of Clarence, and Sir Thomas Graham and his staff, comfortably seated round a table covered with decanters of sparkling wine and well-filled glasses. A staff officer came out and invited me into the room, which however I declined. After apologizing for my inadvertent intrusion, I retired somewhat disappointed at my want of success. . . .

"After a brief halt at the nameless place, where I had breakfasted, dined and supped on two cold potatoes, it was considered the troops had obtained sufficient rest, and time to refresh themselves, although the regiments covering the retreat could not have halted more than forty minutes. Anyhow, in less than an hour, all were again in motion. . . . The soldiers could not understand this retrograde movement. They had beaten the enemy in the morning, then why fly from him at night? This was a general question during the retreat. . . .

"Nothing could be more irksome or annoying than this dreary night march, moving as we did at the rate of less than two miles an hour, and frequently not more than one, halting every few minutes to allow the divisions to close up. The cold was so severe that at every temporary halt the men threw themselves down on the road in heaps, with the idea that the united warmth of the mass would impart fresh vigour to their

MAP TO ILLUSTRATE THE MILITARY OPERATIONS DESCRIBED IN THE BOOK

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stiffened and almost frozen limbs. How those underneath, who formed the substratum of each heap on which the incumbent group rested, escaped suffocation, it is difficult to imagine ; for thirty or forty men would sometimes huddle together and form but one heap. . . . The men were so worn with fatigue, too, that many slept as they marched along. . . .

" The men were willing to meet the enemy again, even if superior in numbers, and they indulged in the wildest conjectures as to the cause of our retreat. They continued, however, in high spirits, though retreating generally exercises a depressing influence on an army ; but their cheerfulness never flagged although exposed to intense cold and prolonged fatigue. Every individual soldier in that army was as thickly covered with hoar-frost as the trees which studded the adjacent country ; and the moustaches of those who wisely cultivated the hirsute appendage, as a protection against the cold, soon found their breath freeze on the hair after every expiration until the moustache became converted into a solid cake of ice. Those who shaved the upper lip had the skin scarified in a remarkable manner by the action of the frost."

The British force were back at Calmpthaut on the morning of the 14th January, and here the diarist writes : " Our little army of eleven or twelve thousand men is now in full retreat, having marched, with an occasional halt of a few minutes' duration, for upwards of sixteen consecutive hours, and been under arms for more than twenty-four. Why or wherefore we know not ; but I hear the soldiers, who always assign a cause for everything, say to each other, as we march along the road, that Marshal Macdonald is on our track with eighty thousand men. If this is the case, as we are

wending our way towards the coast, I suppose we shall have to turn on our pursuers and fight a bout with them before we can get on board ship; and I think we can make as good a stand as Sir John Moore did at Corunna. Our brave chief, whom we know to be a plucky old fellow, will find himself well supported by his troops, among which the old and bold 35th will, I am certain, stick to him through thick and thin to the last. But these are not pleasant anticipations, and the report of the renowned marshal pursuing us may after all be without foundation—a mere chimera of the men's creation. Retreating is never agreeable to those who wish for professional honours; but there is no help for it, and no doubt there is a good reason for our retrograde movement."

We are told that certain croakers were seized with the most gloomy apprehensions, and raked up accounts of disasters which had befallen every British army that had served in Holland—such as those under the Duke of York in 1793; and again in 1799, of both of which the writer gives many harrowing details. "But," says Lieut. Austin, "with the full knowledge of the horrors of former winter campaigns to reflect on, and a long and severe season before us, our prospects were not the most cheering. Notwithstanding this knowledge the army was actuated by the very best spirit, and none but the habitual grumblers gave way to despondency, although each one knew he would be called upon to endure privations from scanty supplies and exposure to intense cold. . . ."

It is not very apparent why the reason of the retrograde movement should have been so long withheld from the force; but it was not until the 16th January, three days after the retreat had commenced, that it

became known the army was marching back to resume its former position about Rozendaal, because Bülow had failed the British. In his advance on Antwerp, Sir Thomas Graham had calculated on Bülow and his Prussians co-operating with the British before Antwerp ; but was disappointed after winning a good position for investing the place. The Prussian general had then, seemingly, proved unwilling to act in concert with the British ; and Sir Thomas Graham accordingly decided he could not maintain his forward position unaided. Hence the retrograde movement.

" The French still held Antwerp, Bergen op Zoom, and other places of strength. Notwithstanding Napoleon's recent defeats, having Belgium in his interests, he could in a moment dispatch a sufficient force to make an inroad into Holland, and drive us back to our ships. Such was the idea among the desponding ; but the well-informed and high-spirited portion of the troops knew that the advancing allied army could not be far distant ; and that any force sent against the British would soon be opposed by a still more numerous body of the allied armies of Europe ; so that we only had to make a stand in some good position till the Russians and Prussians arrived. . . ."

The popularity of General Gibbs is emphasized by the writer, who states that, during the march of the 15th January from Calmpthaut to Escher, the general marched on foot at the head of the column. " This officer from his gentlemanly bearing had become a great favourite with all ranks. His frank and conciliating manner appeared in favourable contrast with some morose and uncouth commanders, who in their ignorance of what was due to those under them, seemed to consider that supercilious behaviour and repulsive mien

were essential to ensure respect. . . . During the march many of the officers placed themselves at the head of the column, and whiled away the time in conversation with our popular general. . . ."

The Dutch at this period employed no means of marking distances by milestones along the main thoroughfares. "The method adopted by the inhabitants of computing distances in this country is by calculating time against space, that is by reckoning how far a man at any ordinary walking pace can travel in the hour. Thus it is said a place is three hours distant, meaning thereby nine miles or thereabouts. . . . Although we had been on some of the principal roads in the country, the main arteries of communication between distant places, we had seen little or no appearance of traffic; and we missed the well-appointed stage-coaches, post-chaises, and private carriages, such as were seen on all our English roads. The general modes of travelling in Holland were by the *treckschuytes* on the numerous canals which intersect all the northern provinces in every direction; but which are not available during the frost generally prevailing from December to March inclusive. Or by light wagons drawn by two horses harnessed abreast of each other. Both modes are tedious in the extreme, but economical. . . ."

Rozendaal was reached on the 16th January in a blinding storm of snow which obscured every object around. "Indeed, the snowflakes, mixed with spiculæ of ice, fell so fast and thick that it was impossible to see our men at a few yards' distance. . . . and even then they loomed dimly through the snowy atmosphere like the fading figures in a dissolving view. The piercing north-east wind blew the particles of ice and flakes of snow right into our faces until we were

almost blinded ; and the larger sharp pieces of ice cut the face and made the cheeks and tips of the ears stream with blood. Later in the morning the snow and ice shower became somewhat abated in violence ; but the storm still roared through the trees as though it would fell them with a crash, or rend every bough from its parent stem."

The officers of the Light company on advanced guard, however, plunged through the storm as rapidly as possible in eager anticipation of once again occupying the comfortable quarters of the hospitable physician at Rozendaal, where they had previously been billeted. Great was their disappointment, therefore, on their arrival to find chalked over the door, " General Skerrit and Staff." Accommodation of sorts was presently obtained elsewhere, and the philosophical young subaltern writes, " Although it was much inferior to that enjoyed under the roof of our former host, campaigners should not be over nice, and ought always to accommodate themselves to the vast variety of circumstances which they are sure to meet with in war. One day in a palace, and another in a hovel, or even in a ditch by the roadside, are the vicissitudes they must be prepared to encounter."

Out into the storm again almost at once, was the lot of Austin ; for barely had he dried his clothes at a fire in the billet, than he had to take command of a picket on the road to Bergen op Zoom, and situated at some distance out of Rozendaal. During the night he got into touch with one of the enemy's patrols, which they afterwards ascertained, from a prisoner, had been sent out to discover the extent of the British position ; and whether the retreating force was preparing to retire to the coast—a thing never contemplated.

"After retiring from before Antwerp, the British troops were distributed in the different towns and villages around; but in such a manner as would ensure their junction in a few hours. They could therefore be concentrated on any given point on the least emergency. . . ."

Whilst thus stationary, the energetic youth paid visits to his old host and hostess at Houver, presenting the son of the house with a French musket captured before Antwerp, which the Dutch lad was desirous to have as a souvenir. The diarist narrowly escaped losing his way and perishing in the open, on his return journey to Rozendaal in the dark, owing to a terrific snowstorm having come up, which obliterated all traces of the road except where bounded by high fences.

Though the force remained stationary for some time, the commissariat arrangements still appear to have been deplorable. It is true that fuel, in the shape of oak logs, was now issued for the first time during the campaign, but the bread served out to the troops is again described as "a nauseous compound of black saw-dust like rye," though the country abounded in wheat. The writer apologizes for dwelling on the subject, but truly states, "good bread is the staff of life, and tends greatly to preserve men in health and vigour fully as much as animal food." He has some pertinent remarks also to offer on the indiscriminate issue of spirits to the troops.

"The daily supply of 'schnapps' (Hollands) was served out in camp kettles, and then subdivided at the rate of a third of a pint to each individual soldier. Instead of storing this supply in their wooden canteens for periods of unusual exposure or exertion, the men generally drank it off at once, undiluted as it was, in

order as they said, ' to make sure of it,' or lest ' they might be killed before they got it under their belts.'

" The injudicious and indiscriminate issue of ardent spirits on active service, and on board ship to old and young alike, has always been a subject of regret to me, and I have frequently suggested that an equivalent, either in money or an increased quantity of some other ration, should be given in lieu of spirits to those who so desired. Drunkenness is the bane of the British army, and whatever tends to diminish that vice should be encouraged. . . . Many young recruits, country lads who have been accustomed to nothing stronger than beer or cider, dislike the more powerful stimulants, and at first are disinclined to take it ; but, jeered at as milk-sops by the habitual and hardened topers, who volunteer to drink the tyro's allowance as well as their own, the young rustic soon learns to follow in the steps of others, and at last takes without hesitation the potent poison which at first had burnt and inflamed his throat until his eyes streamed with water, and the whole nervous system had winced under its pernicious power. . . .

" Our military system makes men drunkards by giving them a taste for ardent spirits, and then punishes them for indulging that taste ; and thus the false unnatural appetite which has been created by authority becomes the means of degradation and punishment. Rulers first foster a habit, and then endeavour to check it."

During another tour of picket duty on the Bergen op Zoom road, Austin was concerned in the capture of a French officer. " In the dull grey morning twilight I saw a French officer and four or five men creeping stealthily along under the fence towards an

angle in the road which formed a complete elbow and led to the rear of my position. . . . I at once determined to cross a field in front and endeavour to capture the officer; so, desiring any four of my men who were good runners to follow me . . . and telling them the object I had in view, we started off at a rapid pace across the enclosure in my front. I was well supported by three of the men, but the fourth volunteer was anything but nimble, so when, on approaching the fence which bounded the road, I saw the French picket marching to the support of their officer, I turned round and shouted to the laggard to go back; but he still came plodding on.

"Seeing that no time was to be lost, or the enemy's picket would be on us, I leaped over the fence into the road with my three active fellows. A volley was fired at us, and though the bullets tore up the ground around we escaped unhurt. Running along the road at our utmost speed towards our post, we captured the French officer on our way; but the men who accompanied him escaped by crossing the enclosure on the left of their position. On looking behind me for an instant, I saw the blundering laggard, whom my shouting had failed to warn of danger ahead, leap from the fence into the arms of three or four French soldiers, who were ready to receive him, crouching down so that he could not see them until too late to retreat. Though not pitying the stupid fellow, who thus fell into a trap which might have been avoided, I was much vexed at losing one of my men."

Apparently some of the detachments around Rozendaal were able at this time to procure fowls from the inhabitants, "and though most of this poultry was of patriarchal age, it made excellent broth, and when well

stewed was a positive luxury, albeit there were no knives to carve it with. Our stock of army cutlery was confined to a clasp-knife and a clasp-fork, the handles of which fitted by pins and slots to each other; and, with the addition of a clasp-spoon, attached to the opposite end of the fork handle, made a very useful portable pocket apparatus, but at the same time one that was by no means suited to delicate and skilful carving. Accordingly, fowls were mangled in the most barbarous manner imaginable, the flesh being removed without disjointing a single bone, so that the osseous skeleton denuded of fleshy integuments remained intact—a memento of keen appetites and blunt carving knives."

VIII

Second Advance on Antwerp

"ON the 24th January, 1814, and the following day, convoys of stores with some siege guns arrived, so that our artillery began to assume a more respectable appearance, but throughout the campaign we were deficient in this very necessary arm. Notwithstanding this deficiency everything betokened preparations for a vigorous prosecution of the siege of Antwerp. The intense frost caused delay; most of the harbours were completely frozen over, and the ice formed along some parts of the coast extended to a distance of two or three miles from the shore, so that even the mails had to be landed in ice boats. In spite of these natural obstacles, we should have got on very well and much more rapidly had not Red Tape and Routine continually clogged our proceedings. Or, as a French officer on a former occasion, when writing from the seat of war, said, 'Diplomacy and the weather are our greatest enemies.'

"Up to this point our baggage had been conveyed by the native teams and country wagons through arrangements between the military officials and local civil authorities; but all at once, and quite unexpectedly, an order was issued to the effect that each officer would henceforth have to provide means of transport for his own baggage, and be prepared to take the field

at a moment's notice. This order almost produced a panic in the army, for many of the officers of the line, who had not received their pay for two months, were short of cash, and had not the slightest idea that they would be called upon to purchase horses at so short a notice. And greater still was their dismay when it was discovered . . . that the staff and the Guards had been made aware of this arrangement some days before the promulgation of the order . . . and had quietly bought up all the horses, warm clothing and furs, in or near the town. Thus the less fortunate linesmen had to shift as best they could, and felt annoyed that consideration for some and disregard for others should prevail. Love of truth impels me to make these observations even at the risk of being considered a grumbler, and writing in the style of ' a man with a grievance.' "

And in a nice hunt for transport the young officers of the Light company of the 35th had to indulge, scouring the country in every direction within a radius of four or five miles of Rozendaal, and visiting many farm-houses without success, as every beast suitable for the purpose had already been snapped up. At length, when almost despairing of obtaining the object of their search, they came upon " an exceedingly lonely house, situated in the midst of a clump of wide-spreading trees, and which could only be approached by a narrow intricate lane. Altogether, the obscurity was so profound that no indication of a human dwelling appeared in sight until close upon the building. This seemed to be our last chance, and failing here we must have despaired of succeeding in our search. Such minor anxieties as these may appear trifling in their relation, but to us they were of serious consequence ; for unless we procured some kind of conveyance for our baggage,

small in compass as it really was, there was no alternative but to leave it behind; and in that case even the few changes of raiment we possessed would no longer be available for use."

The Dutch farmer produced his team, consisting of two gigantic mares; but in spite of his seclusion he had already heard of the demand for horse-flesh, and forthwith named an exorbitant sum as his price for his steeds. "The sly twinkle of the Dutchman's eyes informed us plainly enough that we had to deal with a man as knowing as a Yorkshire horse-dealer, and that he knew our necessities, and was determined to profit by them. . . . The Boer asked a sum beyond all our worldly wealth in Dutch money, so after a lengthened negotiation . . . we were about to abandon all hope of succeeding in our purchase when the Dutchman, guessing our determination, relented. He then made a virtue of letting us have, on the plea of patriotism for his country, and love of the House of Nassau, a mare, harness and light cart for about double their true value.

"The money paid and the purchase duly delivered over to us, we more particularly examined our newly-acquired steed. She was jet black in colour, high, large and plump, sleek but aged; and I could imagine it was just such another clumsy brute that the bluff and sensual sovereign, Henry the Eighth, had in his mind's eye, when he compared his newly-acquired bride, Anne of Cleves, to a Flemish mare. Harry wanted a wife, and we a steed, and each obtained something akin to what was wanted in the same market; and there was just about as much sentiment in our purchase as in Hal's bargain."

The officers then drove "the sable leviathan" into

Rozendaal, taking the ditch on each side of the tortuous lane at frequent intervals with the wheels of their chariot, as they had no reins with which to guide the animal. Consequently she took her own course in defiance of every effort to control her ; for, as their servants later complained to the officers, she did not understand English, and their admonishing voices had little effect in directing her steps.

The transport problem overcome, the next question was that of warm clothing for the impending advance on Antwerp during the rigours of winter. Those in the know had already cleared Rozendaal out of everything in the way of furs and other forms of warm garments ; so two days' leave of absence was obtained by three officers of the 35th to make purchases on behalf of their brother-officers in a town twelve to fifteen miles distant. Lieut. Austin's share of the spoil was a Siberian cat skin and the fur of two silver rabbits, with which a pair of leather gloves were lined, and covered on the backs. The men had no extra warm clothing whatever issued to them ; and though their ordinary dress was warmer than that of the officers, it was not suited for a winter campaign in a cold climate, which proved to be one of the severest seasons known for many years.

The shop-keepers at Rozendaal promptly raised their prices about two-hundred per cent. because, says the youthful chronicler, " wherever British officers have dealings they are sure to spoil the market. When we first began to make purchases, something like the current prices of the country were demanded ; not less we may be certain. But silly young officers, on finding the sum asked for an article was considerably less than that which they had paid for a similar thing in England,

would exclaim with an air of ignorant surprise, 'What! only two guelders for that nice pair of gloves: why, we should have to pay four for such a pair in England.' This no doubt was frequently said in order to appear grand and amiable to the *vrow* who served behind the counter. The shop-keepers soon learnt to take their cue from such silly remarks, and enhanced prices to the standard of our military taste."

Does not the same criticism apply with equal force to-day? Many who fought in the various theatres of war between 1914–18 know that the same foolishness on the part of young officers and soldiers still exists. A century of experience in such matters appears to have taught us little, for the Britisher invariably spoils the market to this day—wherever he may be campaigning. Yet we are credited with being a nation of shop-keepers!

"At one shop, a shrewd pretty Dutch girl had contrived to pick up a smattering of English; and when an old campaigner ventured to remark that prices had been greatly enhanced since our arrival in the town, the *vrow*, affecting surprise at such an idea being entertained, replied in a curious mixture of Dutch and broken English, 'Drinky de schnapps, smoky de pipe, and kissen de vrow, and all vor nix; dat is goot vor de Englishman.' Even those who could not 'Hollands spraken' understood this remark was meant to imply the English wanted to get their goods for nothing—a most unfounded insinuation."

The frost had now become so intense that, when on outpost duty, the troops found it exceedingly difficult to procure enough water to drink. Sufficient for ablution purposes was out of the question, for the ditches were so completely frozen over that the soldiers could not penetrate the ice with their bayonets. They were

frequently driven to the necessity, therefore, of melting the snow in their mouths as a substitute for a draught of water, and rubbing the frozen snow over the face instead of washing it; but the cheery souls turned every hardship into a joke.

"Late on the night of the 29th January we received an order to march on the following morning at six o'clock; but such a morning it proved to be that few persons in their passage through life can have experienced such another for inclemency. Rain, snow, hail and large pieces of jagged pointed ice mingled in one incessant shower, and these on falling to the ground became frozen into slippery sheets of ice; while the wind blew furiously from the north-east, and it seemed as though the elements had conspired to prevent our moving. . . . It rained heavily whilst it froze, and froze sharply whilst it rained. This may be considered an impossibility by some persons, but the explanation is not difficult. . . .

"In the midst of this hurly-burly of the elements, the 95th Rifles arrived from a distant outpost. How the poor fellows got along in such a storm, and in the blackest darkness, it was difficult to imagine. They were all of course in a most pitiable plight, and were coolly told, after buffeting against the war of the elements through some dreary miles of road, that they should not have moved out; but they, like good soldiers, had obeyed their orders to be in Rozendaal before six a.m., in order to march with the main body from that place. We were for the moment more fortunate, for when we commenced to get our men assembled, a verbal order passed from regiment to regiment directed us to keep under shelter till further orders. . . .

"About eight o'clock it was just possible to discern that morn had arrived, and though the storm continued without any signs of abatement, and the weather seemed getting colder and colder, the order to assemble and march was given. With the spirit and energy of British soldiers, all turned out simultaneously, and in a few minutes were on the road to Calmpthaut. . . . The trees creaked and groaned, swaying from side to side, and see-sawing as if straining every fibre with all their might and main to prevent being up-rooted or shattered by the storm, as it rushed roaring and whistling through their leafless branches. The lighter snow flakes whirled and eddied through the air in wild confusion, while the more ponderous pieces of ice fell with a force and velocity that drew blood from the ears or other parts exposed to their merciless action. . . .

"Having the advantage of dim daylight, gloomy as it really was, we strode along in the storm and at length arrived at the poor and scattered village of Calmpthaut, wet, cold, and partially frozen. A more painful march men never went through. Getting cover in a small farm-house by the road-side as quickly as we could, we placed the men of the Light company in the kitchen, and we three officers occupied a small adjoining room with a brick floor."

Kindling a fire in the centre they proceeded to dry their saturated garments, and stew themselves some food in a kettle. At night straw was spread over the brick floor, on which they reclined and slept soundly. An hour before daybreak all were again under arms, and the Light company extended along the front of the position.

"The troops had not long been in this position before the enemy appeared in considerable force with the

evident intention of making an attack. No sooner, however, was the dark grey column seen approaching than Captain —— (commanding a wing of the 35th in support of the Light company) made a hasty retrogade movement without first calling in the Light company. Consequently it was left to shift for itself, either to fight it out, or surrender if beaten. . . . We were so intently watching the approaching enemy, and preparing to receive him with vigour, that we at first did not perceive that the supporting force had retired; and when this was seen the retreating wing was far away in the rear.

"The enemy, seeing part of the British force hastily retreating, moved forward to attack the position with the confidence of men who imagine an easy conquest is before them; but they had reckoned without their host. Captain Shaw, who commanded the outpost, had so well arranged his plan of defence, that when the enemy attempted to penetrate the position, a subdivision under my direction met them with such a deadly fire that their ranks were thrown into disorder.

"In the meantime, Captain Shaw had crept round under cover of a mound of sand, and with the remainder of the company poured into the confused mass a volley which so completely discomfited them that a hasty retreat, or rather a disorderly flight, to a more respectful distance was the immediate consequence. Nor did they venture to attempt to force the position a second time. In all probability they imagined that our force in the sand-pits was much greater than it really was. It was under one hundred men, while the attacking force could not have been less than eleven or twelve hundred men. We had, however, the mortification to

see ourselves completely surrounded, and all chance of retreat cut off. . . .

"Seeing the broken shaft of a wagon lying in one of the sand-pits, it was at once erected on the highest point of our position as a flagstaff, and an Indian silk handkerchief tied to it by way of a colour. Whilst thus engaged, the enemy fired heavily from a distance, but without injury to us, although several balls struck our rude flagstaff. Two such balls striking the same spot became as firmly welded together as though they had been cast at the same time in a double mould. These bullets I afterwards cut out of the wood, and preserved them in my small collection of curiosities. . . .

"A brief consultation of the three officers was held to consider the best mode of proceeding under the very trying circumstances in which we were now placed. It was agreed that at night an attempt should be made, if able to hold the position till darkness set in, to force our way through the cordon around us; but after remaining hemmed in among the sand-pits for about four hours, we beheld with great delight a British column approaching; whereupon the enemy beat a hasty retreat, and left us free to join the troops that had so opportunely come to our relief.

"This position had been maintained for upwards of four hours in defiance of a very superior force; and, fortunately, without sustaining any loss beyond two men who were slightly wounded in the neck and shoulder, and the narrator of these events who received a skin graze on the right eyebrow. . . .

"Had such an action as this been performed in any other service than the British, Captain Shaw would have been promoted; but such trifling affairs, though exhibiting in a high degree the tact and courage of

individuals, were thought lightly of: and as they brought no credit to the general and staff they consequently remained unnoticed. . . . Captain Shaw had on previous occasions displayed coolness and courage of no ordinary kind, but such qualities were seldom considered as entitling an officer of subordinate rank to promotion. During the unfortunate expedition to Walcheren . . . Captain Shaw commanded the Grenadier company, and had charge of a picket consisting of one hundred men, chiefly belonging to his own company. The picket was stationed on a sand-hill, when just before the first grey streak of morning broke, he discovered that his position was surrounded by a greatly superior force. . . . Forming his men silently opposite the point where the enemy mustered in greatest strength, he directed a volley to be fired, and under the canopy of smoke instantly made an impetuous rush with the bayonet at the head of his grenadiers. His opponents were scattered, truly without metaphor, like chaff before the wind.

" On another occasion when the garrison of Flushing made a sortie, the Grenadiers and Light company of the 35th, under Shaw's command, held an advanced post. He instantly closed with the enemy in a narrow road, when a sanguinary contest ensued. Some men unfixed their bayonets and dealt out their death blows right and left with the butt ends of their muskets ; and by the time the general commanding the brigade arrived with reinforcements, the enemy had been defeated and was in full retreat. The general, delighted at the gallant act, thanked the officers and men for their spirited conduct, but that was all they ever got for their bravery and devotion.

" I relate these gallant exploits because they have

never yet been recorded, which they deserve to be; and also as showing the kind of encouragement formerly held out to our brave, meritorious and devoted soldiers. . . .

"When released from our uncomfortable position among the sand-pits on Braeschaet Heath, we returned to Calmpthaut, and there most of the Light company remained for the night; but as though I had not already experienced enough of the heath, I marched out again between three and four o'clock in the afternoon with a picket of thirty men to the front, in the direction of the road from Antwerp to Bergen op Zoom. . . . The cold was intense and our supply of fuel scanty, so the men with difficulty escaped being frozen. To prevent getting benumbed with the cold, I passed the greater part of the night in patrolling around my post, and sliding on an ice-covered pool, which I found in a depression close to my picket. When warmed and fatigued with the exercise, I seated myself beside the men at the meagre bivouac fire. In the morning we rejoined our regiment when it was about to start for Braeschaet . . . where we arrived soon after noon. . . .

"The Light company, officers and men, with other troops, altogether amounting to nearly two hundred men, occupied the house of the Burgomaster. . . . Every room was crowded with soldiers, and we all anticipated a tolerable night's rest on the beds and mattresses invitingly spread out. But we had scarcely entered the house when a shell broke through the roof, and exploding among the men killed and wounded nineteen of them, belonging to different regiments. . . .

"We were as yet somewhat ignorant as to the exact line of country occupied by the enemy along our front,

and as it was requisite that this should be known in order that our pickets and sentries might be posted to the best advantage at night, we had before dark . . . examined the different houses and positions in our front. . . . At the first few farms we visited we sought in vain for a guide, who could point out the different roads, and the posts occupied by the enemy, as well as to impart other desirable information. . . . At length we were constrained to take a guide *per fas et ne fas*, so fixing on an intelligent-looking fellow gave him in charge of two soldiers. The reluctant guide finding opposition fruitless seemed reconciled to his new office, and furnished much of the information sought for . . . but presently he miscalculated the distance, and led us rather closer to one of the enemy's stations than was pleasing to him . . . for when a few riflemen fired on us, the whistling bullets acted on our guide as a spur would on a fiery colt."

The man bolted and could never be overtaken by the heavily accoutred soldiers who started off in pursuit of him. Having ascertained, however, with accuracy the different positions occupied by the enemy, the reconnoitring party returned to Braeschaet. Shortly after re-entering the Burgomaster's house, the officers heard a great commotion below stairs, and found a Cossack chasing the Burgomaster from room to room and belabouring him with the flat of his sword. The Cossack was finally expelled, together with three other of his marauding companions, who had broken into the Burgomaster's cellar and were loading themselves with bottles of wine and spirits.

"The enemy still continued to fire an occasional shot at the British position, and presently a cannon-ball entered the room as we sat drinking grog out of

basins. It passed right over the table and between the heads of those seated round it, and buried itself in the wall at the opposite side of the apartment."

Towards nightfall a crowd of old men, women and children arrived before the outposts. They had been expelled from Antwerp by the French who, in anticipation of a close investment of that place, determined to reduce the number of mouths to be fed in the city. The poor wretches were perishing from the intense cold, so the British troops on outpost duty gave up much of their own rations to prepare a stew for the fugitives, and provided shelter for them for the night.

The officers were able to elicit little information, however, from these Dutch, who appeared to speak no language but their own, until eventually they alighted on a boy about fourteen years of age, and of intelligent mien. He could speak French, and from him they gleaned some items of military interest concerning Antwerp and the enemy.

"The youth had been to sea and had seen something of the world, and related several anecdotes of Napoleon, which were characteristic of that great man. Instead of being steeped in inordinate pride, and consequently ignorance, as too many crowned heads are through receiving impressions of things from courtiers and flatterers around them . . . Napoleon, with the activity incidental to a man of energy and talent, saw everything with his own eyes, and formed his own judgment. It was Napoleon's habit to converse with people of every grade, without the intervention of court chamberlains to drill them into automatons; and he elicited from those he conversed with the free expressions of their opinions by inviting them to be frank and communicative. Nor did he lose one iota

of his dignity by free intercourse with his subjects. . . .

"Napoleon took a great interest in Antwerp, as being one of his best and safest harbours where he had caused noble basins for his ships to be constructed. When he visited the port, he would walk or ride on its capacious quays and, aided by his knowledge of physiognomy, select an intelligent sailor or labourer, and obtain from him a full account of his present condition, future prospects, his aspirations and immediate wishes. The youth to whom we had given shelter informed us that on Napoleon's last visit to Antwerp, the Emperor had addressed him among several others. He inquired in what manner the boy was dieted, how he obtained his clothes, what kind of berth he slept in, whether his general treatment was good, the amount of wages he received, the nature of the work or duty he had to perform, the number of hands on board his ship, her tonnage, the traffic she was engaged in, and a hundred other questions that would suggest themselves to an intelligent mind."

IX

Second Capture of Merxem

ON the conclusion of their conversation with the youth, the officers on outpost duty lay down to snatch some sleep ; but were aroused from their slumbers at 1 a.m. by the loud summons of bugles. The troops turned out with alacrity, and the Light company of the 35th immediately moved out some distance in advance of Braeschaet to ascertain the cause of the alarm. They at once saw a strong column of the enemy formed up, but hesitating how to act as their intended surprise attack on the British had evidently misfired. Skirmishers were quickly sent out to both flanks to see if the enemy had penetrated the outpost line, whereupon the hostile column retreated towards Antwerp. On returning to their billets the troops found that their recent guests, the fugitives from Antwerp, had fled in the darkness and snow from the scene of an expected conflict.

" The French had established themselves about a mile and a half on the Antwerp side of Braeschaet, and sent patrols during the night close up to the posts occupied by the British pickets. To cut off and capture one of these patrols was considered desirable ; so the Light company, and a few Riflemen, left Braeschaet at 4 a.m. and proceeded cautiously along the road for a mile and a quarter, where there was an abrupt turning.

. . . We then crept through a fence at the road side to await the passing of the enemy's patrol. It was intended that when the patrol was well past our ambuscade we should leap into the road and intercept its retreat. But the patrol did not make its appearance . . . and after waiting shivering in the cold frosty air till near daylight, it was arranged that I should take six Riflemen, and with these active fellows creep along the deep briar-entangled ditch by the roadside until we got close up to the enemy. This part of the plan succeeded, and we crept unseen up to within ten yards of the breast-work constructed across the road, where I could plainly see the French sentries marching up and down their post . . . quite unconscious that a few British soldiers were almost within reach of their bayonets. . . .

" Presently, as had been previously planned, four Hussars of the German Legion trotted gently along the road until they arrived within pistol shot of the enemy . . . and fired their pistols deliberately at the two sentries, who instantly returned the fire, but without effect. A French officer then appeared upon the scene, and seemed to order the sentries to reserve their fire. Thereupon the Germans commenced to abuse the French nation in general, and the sentries before them in particular, calling them everything vile which their German vocabulary, and little knowledge of French, could supply. Notwithstanding these insults, the enemy continued behind their entrenchments quite unmoved by the abuse so freely bestowed upon them. . . .

" It had been arranged that if the enemy sallied forth to attack, the German Hussars were to retire instantly in such a manner as to invite pursuit, and thus

draw the French into the trap set for them. But French soldiers are not so easily caught, and we failed in our plan of making prisoners, so returned disappointed to Braeschaet. . . .

"As the co-operation of Bülow and his Prussians had now been secured, it was understood that the Siege of Antwerp would be prosecuted with vigour by the combined forces; so our thoughts were principally directed to that undertaking. At this time I was so ambitious of acquiring military glory . . . that I quietly gave in my name as being desirous of leading the forlorn hope when the expected breach was made in the walls of the place. I did this as secretly as possible, and thus early, as giving me the claim of priority of application lest some other candidate, equally thirsting for distinction, or extinction, as the event might prove, should wrest the anticipated honour from me. . . ."

On the 1st February, the Light company was ordered to move closer to the enemy, so sentries were placed on the main road and adjacent enclosures about one hundred yards from the French position. The country round was mostly sandy and flat, the enclosures large and separated by beech fences, which retained their yellow-tinged autumnal leaves in spite of the bleak winds of winter. Occasional belts of woodland, and a dark pine forest here and there served to break the monotony of the level scenery; whilst the beech fences formed excellent cover for French *tirailleurs* who defended them with great obstinacy.

"In one of these strips of wood alluded to, a party of the 95th Rifles had established themselves; and at this point we witnessed a kind of little war carried on between the advanced sentries of the two armies, in

which those in the immediate vicinity took an intense interest. This was no less than a trial of skill between a crack shot of the 95th and a French *tirailleur*. The two men had ensconced themselves, each behind a tree, at a distance of about ninety or one hundred yards from each other. The aim of either party was to draw his opponent sufficiently clear from his cover to get a fair shot at him. After various dodges on both sides to accomplish this object, the English Rifleman quietly knelt down, and taking a small round loaf from his haversack, he stuck his bayonet into it and placed his cap on the loaf. He then gently glided the dummy from behind the tree, but in such a cautious hesitating manner as to make it appear as though it was his own head peeping forth, and that he was straining to get a sight of his adversary.

" No sooner was the fictitious cranium poked forth than ' bang ' came a bullet right through it ; and at the same time the Englishman, knowing that his opponent had discharged his musket, threw himself on the ground and began to kick and plunge as though he was mortally wounded. The ruse completely succeeded, for the Frenchman, imagining that he had put his adversary *hors de combat*, was thrown off his guard, and stepped forth from behind his tree to plunder the man to whom he supposed he had given his *coup de grâce*. The English Rifleman, seeing his opponent was quite clear of his cover, fired and brought him to the ground with unerring aim ; and then hurried forward to rifle the unfortunate fellow of all he possessed. A French soldier's knapsack generally contains a miscellaneous collection of articles, among which it is almost certain to find a number of tender epistles from fair devoted admirers of the warrior. . . .

"The kind of petty warfare just described is generally discouraged and seldom attempted, the sentries of the contending armies mostly remaining unmolested on their posts. . . . The reason is obvious, for no good could result from such a course of action, and if followed the outposts would be continually firing, and the supports in a constant state of activity and harassed with unnecessary duty. . . ."

There were some fine old chateaux in the neighbourhood, which were visited by the young subaltern when off duty, as these were occupied by detachments of various regiments, including his own. They appear to have been magnificent mansions equipped with wonderful paintings, paper on the walls, plate glass and expensive furniture—much of which, unfortunately, had been damaged by the soldiers billeted therein.

Returning from one of these outings with a brother-officer, the two youngsters almost stumbled into the arms of two French sentries with a party of at least seventy men in their rear. "To turn and retrace our steps was the work of a moment, but the sentries first favoured us with a shot a piece which luckily did no damage. One bullet cut a strip out of my companion's coat, however, and at the same instant he stumbled and fell; but before I could turn to render aid, he recovered himself and we soon passed out of range."

Thus the two young officers got safely back to the Light company just in time to accompany it on a special service for which it had been selected during their absence.

"Major MacAlester had come to the front in order to accompany the expedition . . . and day began to close in as we moved quietly a few paces to the front. Leaving the road, we made a détour across the fields on

our right ; and . . . after prying into a few barns we came to a thick fence at the side of a by-road where a French sentry was leisurely pacing up and down, quite unconscious that one hundred British soldiers were within a few feet of him. When his back was turned towards us . . . Captain Shaw crept silently through the fence and crouched down behind a heap of sods. . . . He here waited for the sentry to pass him, intending to spring upon the unsuspicious Frenchman when his back was again turned, and to seize him by the collar so that he would be unable to use his musket. . . . But the impatience of some of the Riflemen, who were less under control than our men, frustrated the whole plan. One of the Rifles on seeing a man in the road said to a comrade next him, 'It's a Boss.' 'No, it's a Frenchman,' replied another, and just as Captain Shaw was about to spring on the sentry a Rifleman fired without orders. . . . He missed his mark, but nearly shot our gallant captain as he rose from behind the mudheap. The sentry fled precipitately, firing off his musket to alarm his picket.

" In a second or two we were treated to a random fusillade which did us little harm. As we had received strict orders to avoid bringing on an engagement, the fire was not returned. . . . Although the bullets fell thick and fast during the next twenty minutes, only one man was slightly wounded ; this immunity from damage being due to the darkness of the night, and uncertainty of our exact position. . . ."

The company then made a fresh cast with the intention of surprising another enemy outpost ; but in the pitchy darkness they came upon it sooner than anticipated, when they were greeted by a volley

down the road. Happily it only inflicted a few slight wounds, in spite of the opponents being barely twenty paces from each other. The enemy fired high, miscalculating the range in the dark, so the balls either passed harmlessly over, or perforated the caps of the men, some of which had two bullets through them.

"At this startling surprise, the first impulse of the men was to fix their bayonets and rush on the enemy; but this would have been rash as we were quite ignorant of the numbers opposed to us, or the obstacles in the way; besides being contrary to positive orders not to engage the enemy. The impulse was checked, therefore, by giving the words of command, 'Right about face: order arms: unfix bayonets,' which were promptly obeyed. The men were then faced about again, opened out, and allowed to deliver their fire. . . .

"For some time a very heavy fire was maintained on both sides . . . the enemy still continuing to aim above our heads. . . . In the midst of the contest, Major-General Herbert Taylor, who had assumed command of our brigade, brought up the Grenadier company of my regiment to our support. . . . By the time they arrived, however, the contest was nearly over, and they only came in for a share of the last volley, several men receiving scalp wounds. . . .

"As the reinforcements marched up, it was determined to indulge the men in their eager desire to close with the enemy . . . and a rush was made at our opponents, who were found ensconced behind a strong breast-work constructed across the road; but as our men bounded over the work the enemy fled, leaving eight of their number killed and five severely wounded. . . .

"In this 'affair of pickets' . . . my left elbow

was struck by a musket ball, but I resolved not to place myself under the surgeon until after the action which we supposed must be fought on the morrow. Binding up my arm, and appearing to make light of the wound, Major MacAlester did not insist on my reporting myself unfit for duty, which he might have done had he been aware of the extent of the injury I had received. . . .

" Major-General Taylor was not sparing in his praises on the Light company for their spirited conduct, and invited the officers to a late dinner with him. After seeing the men to their bivouac, we accordingly repaired at 10 p.m. to the farm-house where the general had taken up his quarters. . . . The repast to us was a sumptuous feast, but as I sat at table the pain of my wound by no means tended to improve my appetite, though I contrived to do something like justice to the jugged hare. . . . When the general bade us good night, he added, ' To-morrow, you will have work to do.'

" On the night of Tuesday the 1st February, several additional regiments moved up from the rear to support those in the advanced position ; and our principal force became concentrated on and near the main road to Antwerp. . . . After leaving General Taylor's comparatively snug quarters we repaired to our men at their bivouac, where the snow was lying deep on the ground. . . . To lie down on the snow with any chance of comfort was quite out of the question ; to continue standing in the cold was equally objectionable. . . . At last some of our men repaired to a barn at some distance from our bivouac and returned with bundles of straw, which they spread under a tree close to a farm-yard, and near a stack

of wood which furnished an abundant supply of fuel for the fire they had kindled. They then procured a number of straight poles similar to those used in the hop gardens of Kent and Sussex; and these they placed to windward in a slanting direction . . . against the tree, their tops being thrust amongst the branches. Under this imperfect shelter from the falling snow we laid down in a circle with our feet close into the fire. . . . And as we thus reclined we could plainly hear the 'Wer da?' challenge of the Prussian sentries on our left, and the 'Qui vive?' of the French to our front. . . ."

Little sleep came, however, to the narrator of these events, owing to the pain from the wound he had received earlier in the day.

"Before daybreak on Wednesday the 2nd February, the troops assembled and took up their allotted positions, and prepared for the coming struggle. Flints were examined, and ammunition inspected to ascertain if it had been damaged by the falling snow; and all turned their thoughts on Antwerp as a prize worthy of their efforts to win . . . . The wind was still in an eastern point, and on its chilly currents the snowflakes were borne thick and fast upon us, whilst our bivouac fires had become a heap of smouldering embers. . . . Notwithstanding this war of the elements, as day dawned through the snow-charged atmosphere, the order to advance was given, and the command repeated along the whole British line. . . .

"The instant the order was issued the buglers of each regiment sounded the advance, each corps taking up the inspiriting notes from those on its flanks. It had been our lot to act much with the old 95th (now the Rifle Brigade), and we were together again on this

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occasion. Whilst we extended our line of skirmishers a brave little bugler-boy belonging to that renowned regiment ran forward about twenty paces, and jumping on to a heap of gravel by the road side, turned the mouth of his bugle towards the enemy and blew a blast, both long and clear, amidst a perfect shower of bullets that flew fast and thick along the *chausée* ; but the hotter the fire the louder he blew. Nor did he desist until the line of skirmishers came up to him, when he quietly took his proper station and advanced with his regiment.

" Every one who witnessed this act of daring bravery in a boy of fifteen, could not fail to admire his coolness and indomitable courage under a very heavy fire ; but, alas ! no means were available in those days to reward the young hero who had behaved so nobly before the enemy. I regret that his name is unknown to me, or else it should be recorded in these unpretending pages. . . .

" The regiments engaged in the day's operations were the 25th, 33rd, 2nd Battalion 35th, 52nd, 73rd, 78th, 91st, 95th Rifles, and a Brigade of Guards. . . .

" As we approached the enemy's position, every one felt that a day of exertion was before him. . . . Feeling somewhat feverish from the effects of my wound, I determined if I outlived the day to place myself under the care of the surgeon ; and in order to husband my strength . . . I mounted a Cossack pony belonging to our Quartermaster and rode alongside my men until . . . the bugle sounded for the Light company to engage the enemy closely. Dismounting, we hurried on to get in front of the column. . . .

" It may be as well to remark here that the Light

infantry company has fully twice, and often thrice, as much fighting as the battalion companies composing the general line. . . . Directly two hostile armies approach each other the skirmishers dash out to the front and engage the enemy, whilst the main body is formed into order of battle ; that is while the divisions and brigades take up their ground. When the troops are placed in their assigned positions, either for attack or for receiving the enemy, the bugles sound the 'recall.' The skirmishers cease firing, and clear the front with the utmost rapidity, and resume their proper positions in the general line ; and then equally participate in the action that follows. Whether the enemy is defeated, or it becomes necessary for our own troops to retire, the skirmishers rush forth either to pursue the flying enemy, or to interpose between the foe and our retiring columns ; and thus prevent a successful enemy pressing too closely on the retreating battalions, and throwing them into confusion. Thus an active intelligent Light infantry officer, who is often thrown on his own resources, will in reality see and perform as much service in a single campaign as, and obtain more practical knowledge than, another not so situated can learn in three or four years. . . ."

The line of skirmishers consisted of the 52nd Light Infantry, the 95th Rifles, and the Light company of the 35th, and after driving in those of the enemy it was found that he was strongly entrenched behind earthworks strengthened by an abattis of trees. The wind blew the snow into the faces of the British, who could scarce see ten yards to their front. Many of the men's muskets had become useless as the damp powder in the pans would not explode, or the charge

ignite ; whereas the enemy's fire kept thinning our ranks. Consequently a rush with the bayonet was made, and the breastwork occupied in a few minutes by the British, the enemy retiring hastily to a similar defensive position in rear. Expelled from that also, they slowly fell back on a strong body of troops holding the suburb of Merxem.

" The weather now began to clear a little, and the branches in the hedgerows and on the trees jingled musically in the breeze as they swayed to and fro in their coating of ice. When a cannon-ball passed through, or crashed among the ice-encumbered wood, a curious wild, but not unpleasant, melody was produced, which continued with fairy-like notes for some seconds ; and when the sun shone forth from between the heavy clouds, the branches and twigs sparkled like diamonds in its beams. . . .

" Our long line of skirmishers kept forcing the enemy's *tirailleurs* from one position to another till we came to a wide open space of heavy ploughed land where our pace necessarily slackened. The enemy . . . had posted a strong force behind a high fence and brought up two field pieces ; and when the British arrived about half-way across the ploughed ground a heavy fire was opened on us, which made some havoc in our ranks. In short, we were well peppered. . . . Urging the men forward, the contest at this point was soon brought to an issue ; for the soldiers breaking through the fence shot or bayoneted such of the enemy as ventured to stand the hand to hand encounter. . . .

" Advancing over a field or two with little opposition . . . we suddenly came upon a party of the enemy in a road, retreating before a very inferior force com-

posed of officers and men of different regiments mingled together. In the eagerness of pursuit these did not seem for a moment to consider the disparity in numbers; but if the British did not reflect on this fact, the French officers did; for seeing how few the numbers were that harassed them they rallied their men, and just as we gained the road they had turned on their pursuers and held them at bay.

"The gallant men who led the British advance, seeing our seasonable reinforcements at hand, cheered and rushed forward; and our party, participating in the enthusiasm, precipitated themselves on the enemy, and in a few seconds a regular mêlée took place. In went the combatants to a hand-to-hand struggle; sharp bayonets pierced proudly-swelling breasts; swords gleamed aloft, or flashed in the air as they descended with lightning swiftness on to ill-guarded heads. Some soldiers clubbed their muskets and dealt out their death-strokes right and left. Such was the confusion that for a few moments friends and foes became so intermingled that it was difficult to act with effect. My brother-subaltern and I were so closely wedged in the throng, and our arms so hampered, that it was impossible to use either the edge or points of our sabres. . . . The only use we could make of our weapons, which were curved like reaping-hooks . . . was to jab away with the hilts at the heads and faces of those in front of us; and I strongly suspect that some of those required the aid of a dentist after the fray was over. In the ruck and strife our captain, Alexander Shaw, performed 'prodigies of valour.' At length a passage was forced through the enemy's ranks, and over those who had fallen in the strife; the discomfited foe broke away and fled

in dismay, leaving some prisoners in our hands and a large number on the road. . . .

" Those of both parties who were severely wounded and fell to the ground were trampled on indiscriminately . . . for the fury of the combatants was such that every thought but that of victory was for the time in abeyance, and it was utterly impossible to mince one's steps amid such a scene of excitement and confusion. . . . The strongest men were overthrown, as well as the less robust. Bayonets, swords, and bullets had levelled all inequalities of strength and stature ; judicious activity shared the best chance, as it always does in a mêlée of this kind. . . . I was fortunate enough to come out of the jumble with a torn jacket, and the slightest of bayonet scratches. . . .

" About 150 men of various regiments, fiery spirits impatient of control, again dashed forward on the road, eagerly striving to overtake the retreating enemy. Close upon these . . . came the more regular line of skirmishers, whose dropping fire and animating cheers ran from rank to rank as the enemy was forced from position to position. In the rear of the skirmishers came the brigades, advancing in line and moving in measured time as steadily as if at a review. . . . In this manner the army slowly but perseveringly moved upon Antwerp—the Prussians under Bülow, and several bodies of Cossacks acting on our left. . . .

" Whenever a favourable opportunity to make a stand presented itself, the French *tirailleurs* availed themselves of it. At intervals belts of trees enabled them to offer a protracted resistance ; the beech fences also screened our opponents till our ranks were close upon them. Behind one of these, six French riflemen concealed themselves . . . until the British line

arrived within seven or eight yards of them, when, each singling out his man, discharged his rifle with deadly precision and ran for his life. Our men hurrying up to the fence, fired at them; but in their haste failed to bring down any of the fugitives. We could see the balls flying about them, ploughing up the snow in showers, and occasionally one or other of them stumble and fall, to the great satisfaction of our men. But up he would get again, and run as fast as his legs could carry him, until the whole party got away in safety, for the time, and rejoined their comrades."

And so a running fight was maintained for a considerable time, varied by the capture of a strongly fortified chateau by General Taylor's brigade, which inclined to the right for that purpose.

"On continuing the advance it was found that extensive preparations to repel an attack had been made at Merxem. Some field-pieces had been brought from the village and placed in position; and when the column advancing by the main road arrived within range, a galling fire was opened, the men seeking the partial shelter of the trees on either side of the *chausée*. After a few rounds of grape shot had swept down the spacious highway, the officers, sword in hand, bounded into the middle of the road, and calling on the men to follow, a simultaneous rush was made. In a moment the guns were abandoned, changed owners, and the enemy in full retreat on their main body. . . .

"As we approached Merxem, the enemy, undaunted by the failure of every effort to impede our progress, advanced with great spirit in open column of grand divisions, their drums beating and eagles displayed. When just within musket range the column began to

deploy into line. The British, nothing loth to meet their opponents, moved forward a few paces to a more open position, and as the French line was formed poured into their ranks a withering fire, which was instantly returned with great animation. . . .

" The firing now became incessant, and was maintained with unflinching bravery on both sides ; but our men, showing impatience at the prolonged and distant firing, and being eager to decide the conflict, were ordered to prepare to close with the enemy. The order ' Quick march ' was given, and when the line was well in motion, the word ' Forward ' was repeated, in order to accelerate the pace. Then burst forth from the ranks a cheer that inspired every soldier's heart with confidence of success ; and as the line neared the enemy, the word ' Charge ' was responded to by a rush that carried all before it. Amidst the thunder of artillery, the incessant rattle of musketry, the loud hurrahs, and the defiant shouts of ' Vive l'Empereur,' Merxem was a second time in our possession."

X

How the Leg was Lost

"AS the enemy retired from Merxem, the Light troops again dashed forward and proceeded far in advance of the main body. It was in fact a few men pursuing an army. Some of the French officers, seeing this to be the case, endeavoured to rally their men and induce them to make a stand, but with little success. Occasionally a few grenadiers would turn and fire on their pursuers. At one moment when within a dozen yards of the enemy, some of them seeing the disparity in numbers seemed inclined to stand and fire into those of the British who were most in advance. Thus a brave officer of the 25th Regiment, Lieutenant Brown was here shot in the side of the chest, the ball passing out through the shoulder. This only excited the men to greater fury, and they rushed in among the enemy's scattered ranks and again put them to flight.

"At this juncture one of their generals came to the rear of his retreating troops . . . and strenuously exerted himself to arrest their flight, but his exhortations and noble example were of no avail. He continued for some time to urge his men to stand, but they had been fairly beaten and went on unmindful of his orders, until some of our Rifles at one side . . . were almost between the general and his men. They

called upon him to surrender, and it was hoped the gallant officer would see the impossibility of escape and submit, so those on the road ran forward expecting to secure him. But he unheeded the summons, and trusting to the fleetness of his horse turned to fly. A sergeant of the Rifles again called on him to surrender, but without effect ; and as the general plunged his spurs into the flanks of his steed, the sergeant fired over the fence and brought the gallant fellow to the ground.

" The men then made a rush at the fallen hero, for such he undoubtedly was, and despoiled him of his valuables. One soldier seized his gold watch, and another the chain attached to it, each contending for the possession of both watch and chain, until at length the chain broke and left each of them a share of the booty. His purse was found to contain several Napoleons, which were fairly distributed between three or four men. His sword and sash fell to the lot of two officers, and his decoration of the Legion of Honour was secured and afterwards presented to the Prince Regent. . . . The name of the French general I did not learn at the time, though I subsequently heard it and committed it to a memorandum which I unfortunately mislaid. . . .

" Another splendid soldier, a captain, who again and again tried to rally his men, was shot in the shin by one of the Light company and made prisoner. As the gallant fellow writhed under the pain of the terrible blow, which had splintered the shin bone to atoms, his noble bearing and look of defiance won my admiration. . . .

" The enemy now made a vigorous effort to dislodge the troops occupying Merxem. Knowing that a

considerable force was concentrated there, they continued a heavy cannonade in that direction. Some houses were set on fire by the shells, and others were perforated or battered down by the iron showers incessantly hurled at the place. . . . Most of the inhabitants had fled as they dreaded the struggle which they knew was about to take place . . . wisely taking with them their most valuable and portable property. Such few of them as remained suffered greatly. Some had their houses knocked about their ears, and were killed or wounded by the falling rubbish; while all were exposed to great hardships by the troops occupying their dwellings, and the bustle and waste occasioned by men engaged in active and deadly warfare. . . .

"When the attack on Merxem had completely succeeded, General Taylor's brigade again moved to the right, in the same manner as the brigade when under General Mackenzie's command had operated on the previous advance on Antwerp. As the French fleet again came in view every soldier's heart swelled with exultation, for it now seemed almost within our grasp; and as the co-operation of Bülow and his Prussians had been secured, all felt sure that it would soon fall into our possession. . . .

"After getting clear of the village, the Light troops moved in extended order towards the dyke in front, which was now, as on our previous visit, occupied by a long line of French troops. The road by which they could be assailed in front was barricaded by high and strong palisades, and the windmill on the dyke . . . had its sides loopholed for musketry. Artillery was also placed in position to command the approach, and a line of battle-ship was moored in the Scheldt with

her broadside landward, so that her fire would enfilade our ranks. . . .

" When we had advanced to within two hundred yards of the dyke, we were ordered to halt and cover ourselves whilst our artillery guns opened on the enemy. We accordingly ensconced ourselves on the ice of a willow-fringed ditch which afforded tolerable shelter, and there waited as a support to the guns which had been brought forward on the road.

" We directed our men to lie down, and cautioned them to keep close as a heavy cannonade was going on ; but a few of the more inquisitive ones stretched forth their heads to peep, in disregard of orders, until a young soldier of the 73rd Regiment, close alongside us, craning up to satisfy his curiosity, was struck by a cannon-ball in the neck, and decapitated in a moment. . . .

" After the cannonading had been kept up with great spirit on both sides for some time, I started forth to silence our guns as our men were becoming impatient at remaining inactive and under cover ; but so intent were our gunners in serving them that all my shouting, gesticulations and waving of my sword aloft failed to arrest their attention. Nor did they wholly cease firing until I was almost before the muzzles of their guns. . . .

" The men then came forth from the cover under which they had partially, and reluctantly sheltered ; and we then led them forward to attack the French troops occupying the dyke and windmill in front. As we approached the position . . . the batteries on the works of the city opened a well-directed fire on our advancing ranks. The artillery on the dyke also fired heavily ; whilst the line of battle-ship in the river on our right flank poured in her broadsides with great

rapidity. But strange to say, we suffered less than would have been expected. This no doubt was due to our moving in extended order, with three paces between the files, so that the iron shower mostly boomed harmlessly through the open spaces, though occasionally a file would be swept away. . . .

"There was no great difficulty in driving the enemy from the top of the dyke, but the windmill was still tenaciously held, and a galling fire kept up from its loopholed sides; and when the Light company of the 35th Regiment closed in its ranks to force the barrier of palisades . . . the firing became extremely heavy. There was now a loud call for hatchets and billhooks to cut away the paling; but as the pioneers were with the battalions in rear none of these implements were at hand. We tried to pull down some of the upright poles, but as they were too firmly bound together to yield to our efforts . . . I thought it possible to swing round the ends of the palisades, that spread out like a fan over the wide deep ditch (from which the ice had been removed) on each side of the road. . . .

"As I was about to swing round the palisades, a perfect storm of shot and shell came booming fast and thick amongst our ranks, and a gallant Borderer, who had previously made himself conspicuous by following a party of the enemy from Merxem, was struck in the arm near the shoulder. The limb was almost severed from the body, hanging by a slight strip of muscle only; and as he fell against me I was sprinkled over with the poor fellow's blood. On receiving the blow the poor man fainted, and some of our soldiers cut off the dangling mangled limb with a clasp-knife.

"The instant after this daring soldier was struck down, another cannon-ball swept off my left leg below

the knee-joint ; and although felled to the earth by the irresistible force of the blow, I experienced no sensation of faintness ; but felt excessively hot, thirsty and savage. As the balls had by this time broken down some of the palisades, and made gaps sufficiently wide for the men to pass through, I said to them with, I imagine, less of that Christian feeling which all ought to possess, ' Go on, and give it them ! '

" The Light company then scrambled up the side of the dyke in front ; but when they crossed over the road at the top they found themselves within ten feet of a greatly superior force, which they fired into and then returned to our side of the dyke. Keeping close under it they were a good deal sheltered from the storm of balls which came sweeping along the British position. The immediate effect of the bold advance over the dyke was the abandonment of the windmill by the enemy, which at once relieved us from a teasing fire of musketry ; but the opposing bodies were still only separated by the intervening dyke, and whoever ventured to show his head above it was pretty sure to get a bullet through the brains. . . .

" The moment after being struck down, I had sufficiently recovered from the shock, or more correctly was not so prostrated by it, as to be able to sit up and examine my wound. I found that the bones were laid bare for some distance up the limb, and appeared as white as the finest ivory, the tendons dangling and quivering like so many pieces of thread ; while the hemorrhage was much less than might have been expected. This latter circumstance was probably due, in some measure, to the severe cold which retarded in a small degree the circulation, and made the blood less active. . . .

"Soon after receiving my wound, however, there came on a burning sensation in the injured part which gradually spread over my whole frame, and I felt a parching thirst which seemed to have converted my tongue into a fire-brand, and my constricted throat into a heated furnace; but there was no water at hand to allay the heat which seemed as though it would consume me. The soldiers pressed round me to offer their unsophisticated sympathy, and vowed to take a signal vengeance on the enemy. . . .

"The call for surgeons was now heard along the whole line, but unfortunately only one, Assistant Surgeon Hay, 52nd Regiment, was up with the advanced troops: and as he was engaged on the extreme right of the line it was some time before his aid could be made available in that part of the position where I had fallen. At length he came and kindly offered his services to me; but as the maimed soldier of the 25th Regiment (Borderers) was still lying senseless on the ground by my side, I directed his attention first to that poor sufferer. The only thing, however, that could be done at the moment was to bind up his shattered and bleeding stump, and administer a stimulant from my canteen. This revived the brave fellow, who was soon able to sit up and await the arrival of a bearer or stretcher to convey him to the rear.

"When Assistant-Surgeon Hay had finished his attendance on the mutilated Borderer, he came to me and first of all cut away the leg of my trousers, so that he could the more readily bind up the remains of my severed limb. This he did with great expedition, and then hastened away to attend on other sufferers who had been stricken down. Although the temporary dressings had been applied with the utmost rapidity,

they proved of the greatest service to those who had received severe wounds ; and how Mr. Hay, even with the activity he displayed on the occasion, was enabled to get through the labour of attending to so many calls was a perfect marvel. . . .

" Those who fell wounded in the open ground were more fortunate than those who had fallen in the woods and plantations ; for the former were removed as speedily as possible. But in some few instances the others remained undiscovered, and there, in the gloomy woods, with the cold snow falling over and drifting around them, the poor frozen creatures passed into eternity.

" After my wound had been temporarily dressed, seeing there was no place at hand to creep into for shelter from the storm of balls which incessantly swept down the road on which I was lying, cutting long deep furrows in it wherever they struck, I stretched myself on my back, folded my arms across my chest, resigned myself to the care of Providence, and waited patiently for the chance of a bearer to carry me to the rear. Whilst lying in this recumbent position, the balls continued to recochet along the road, sometimes striking within two or three feet of the spot on which I was lying, and then bounding away to the rear. One of the missiles pitched so close to me that it tore off portions of the clothes from my left side, and drove a quantity of sand and gravel against a former abrasion of the skin. The injury, though quite superficial, of course added to my sufferings, previously severe enough ; but a firm resolution enabled me to bear it all without complaint. . . .

" Lying mutilated and crushed for a full hour or more on this exposed road appeared almost an age in

duration. The review of every event of my past life, and my future prospects, passed in rapid succession through my mind and memory. . . .

"On first being struck down, my servant, John Hope, a Sussex man, came to my assistance, and as the brave fellow stooped over me I saw the big round drops roll off his manly face, his tears assuring me that he felt deeply for my disaster. I desired him to leave me until the enemy was driven from the mill on the dyke, whence an annoying fire was maintained. Soon after receiving the second graze on my side, John Hope—I like to repeat his name—returned from the attack on the windmill. Seeing me still lying helpless on the road, and exposed to the shot which every instant plunged along it, he was about to lift me up to carry me to a place of safety, if such shelter could be found, but I begged him to desist, as when I moved the blood streamed from my wound and crimsoned the snow-covered ground around. The affectionate fellow's looks eloquently betokened the pain he felt at seeing me so mangled, and he endeavoured to procure a bearer or litter for me. . . .

"The battle-field was, to me, now divested of all the excitement and dignity of glorious war. It was present to my sight in its most appalling form, in all its hideous aspects. Its pomp had been transformed into the horrid reality of a charnel house. The dead were lying about in every conceivable position—poor mangled creatures who in the morning had laughed and joked with comrades were now writhing with pain ; and with imploring accents besought those comrades to save them from a painful protracted death by depriving them of the few brief moments that yet remained to them to live. Others, almost frantic with

the feverish thirst that wounds engender, prayed for a drop of water to allay the misery of parched constricted throats; whilst the frost was gradually but surely fastening on the extremities, so that nothing but instant removal could save them from certain death.

"After lying exposed to the enemy's fire for a considerable time, and expecting every moment to receive my *coup de grâce*, two of the band of the 52nd Regiment came up with a field bearer—a piece of strong canvas fastened to two poles. . . . My own men then raised me up and placed me on the bearer, which was held by the two bandsmen; and accompanied by my servant, the ever trusty John Hope, I was carried across the field towards Merxem. By this time the whole of the exposed surface of my wounded limb was sprinkled over with hoar frost. . . .

"I had to pass along the front of my own regiment, which was now advancing in line across the open ground to support the troops I had left at the dyke; and many anxious inquiries were made as to the extent of my injuries. Major MacAlester, and other particular friends, came forward to offer sympathy . . . and when informed that I was on my way to have my limb amputated, their expressions of sorrow and regret were most feeling. Never shall I forget the ardent terms of friendship which my brave and attached companions-in-arms gave utterance to as my conductors slowly carried me to the rear. My severe wound and the annihilation of my professional hopes scarcely occasioned me as much regret as the pain I felt at parting from officers and men whose attachment I had so frequently experienced. . . ."

"Shortly afterwards, Staff-Surgeon Halliday, and Acting-Staff-Surgeon Cooper came up and offered

their professional services, which I readily accepted. They then directed the men who carried my litter to proceed to Merxem, whither they accompanied me. Arrived there I was borne into the apothecary's shop . . . where I was deposited on the counter amidst the hasty preparations which had been made to amputate my shattered limb. . . .

"The two surgeons had their instruments all ready to operate, when the confusion became so great that it was impossible to proceed. Men of all arms, cavalry, artillery and infantry of the line, were hurrying to the front; whilst staff officers and orderlies galloped full speed along the road. The village was in fact so crowded with troops, who had come up during the action, that every building, including the one I was in, was filled to overflowing with soldiers. And, to add still more to the confusion, cannon balls now and again crashed through the house. The enemy was strenuously endeavouring to dislodge the troops occupying the village; and knowing that a considerable force was concentrated there a heavy cannonade was directed against it. . . .

"As the noise, bustle and confusion . . . were not likely to subside, the surgeons deemed it advisable to remove to a place of greater security. . . . Although anxious to get through the operation before I was too much weakened by loss of blood, I had no objection to offer . . . more especially as the two surgeons, whom I knew by repute to be skilful operators, kindly proposed to attend me. Accordingly, a field tourniquet was fastened round the mangled limb to arrest the hemorrhage, and I was placed in a covered hospital wagon. My limb by this time had assumed a deep purple hue, and was thickly frosted over up to the knee

joint with shining particles of hoar frost. The pressure of the field tourniquet produced a numbing but painful sensation, which caused a most uneasy sickly feeling. . . .

" The hospital wagons for the conveyance of the wounded were intended to hold four persons in reclining positions, or a greater number if capable of sitting up. The wagon I was destined to journey by was already occupied by three poor fellows, all of whom were severely wounded ; and one in particular, a sergeant of the 95th Rifles, appeared to suffer excruciating pain.

" When a sufficient number of wounded men were collected to fill several wagons, the convoy moved to Braeschaet, which place I had left two or three days previously full of hope and ambitious aspirations. A halt was called, and the wagon in which I travelled stopped opposite a chateau by the road side. This building had been fixed on as a temporary hospital, but it was totally destitute of everything requisite for such an establishment. Not a single bed was to be seen, or even a solitary blanket, save those which the wounded men brought with them. I was now removed from the vehicle by two men who carried me into an apartment of the chateau, where, stretched upon the floor and ranged against the walls. were many fellow-sufferers wounded earlier in the day. . . .

" As mine appeared among the worst cases, a bundle of straw was procured from one of the wagons and thrown into a corner, where I was deposited by my conductors ; whilst an operating table was extemporized with some bricks in the kitchen below. While these preparations were in progress I had full leisure to contemplate my situation, and as I knew the nature

and extent of the injury I had received required prompt and painful remedy, I determined to meet the exigency with becoming fortitude. In order to raise the spirits of the soldiers who might have to undergo a similar operation to myself, I conversed with those around me on the military operations of the day . . . and endeavoured to instil some little cheerfulness into my fellow-sufferers, and to raise their courage to the sticking point. . . .

"When the preparations for performing the operation on my limb were completed, it was notified to me that everything was ready, and that the surgeons waited below stairs. I was then carried to the kitchen and placed upon a heap of bricks, which had been hastily piled together for the purpose of an operating table. Spread out on the dresser, the highly-polished surgical instruments glittered; while a sergeant of Rifles, who had just died of his wounds, occupied the farthest end of the said dresser. Several buckets were disposed in convenient places around the brick platform on which I reclined. A bevy of soldiers, mostly skulkers and scamps who had contrived to get employed as hospital orderlies, by pretending to have received wounds or contusions any old woman would have cured in a couple of days, were marshalled in readiness to support and hold me. . . .

"Stipulating with the operators, Surgeons Cooper and Halliday, that I should be allowed to see and examine the limb after it had been severed, I dismissed more than half the attendants, who no doubt were glad to escape from such a scene. I then gave directions to have a sheet . . . placed round my body, with a man to hold it, in order that I might not swerve from the proper position during the operation. Another

man I retained to support my head, with the intention of holding on by the collar of his coat ; while a third and fourth man were placed at each of my lower limbs, to fix and keep them in any position the operators might desire. A flask of brandy was presented to me, but I declined partaking of its contents, feeling confident that I should not sink under the operation. I obtained, however, a draught of water, and then braced myself for the coming test of fortitude and courage.

" When everything was prepared, one of the operators, with knife in hand, inquired if I was ready : and the reply ' Yes ' was scarcely uttered when the keen, well-tempered blade had completed the first part of the operation. Next in order came the saw ; and although I had frequently heard that the pain caused by separating the bone and marrow was dreadful, I found it in reality not more painful than other parts of the operation. Sawing through the bone produced no particular pain beyond a jarring kind of feeling that extended up the whole limb. Taking up the arteries caused a much more sickening sensation than either the cutting or sawing. . . .

" In about ten minutes' time from the commencement of the operation, the stump was strapped up with adhesive plaster and bandaged, and the whole affair completed. During the operation I was painfully alive to everything that passed ; and if my nerves did quiver when the knife divided the living flesh, I was too proud, holding the position of an officer who was bound by duty to set an example to the wounded soldiers, to allow a groan or sigh to escape me. . . .

" My amputated limb was placed upon the dresser alongside the sergeant of Rifles, lying dead on that useful piece of furniture. . . . As soon as a grave

could be dug in the garden behind the chateau, which was no easy matter owing to the earth being frozen to a considerable depth, the remains were deposited therein ; and, no doubt, the Dutch owner has had luxurious crops in his garden ever since. . . ."

XI

With the Wounded at Williamstadt

" AFTER the operation was performed, I was placed on some straw in an adjoining room, with a wood fire blazing on the hearth-stone. Two Irish women had previous possession of this apartment, and appeared to suffer great anxiety about their husbands who were with the army in front. They procured me a drink of milk and water, which I thought the most delicious draught I had ever imbibed. They were so assiduous in their attentions that I almost feared they wished to hold a wake over me. Whether they lightened me of any of the movables I had about me, in my haversack and pockets, I cannot tell ; but certain it is that before I reached my final destination, my razors, knife, fork, spoon, fur cap, etc., had all most unaccountably disappeared. How this happened I could never discover, for I kept everything about my person ; even my sword continued buckled to my side, and my haversack and canteen remained on me for four days and nights after I fell wounded. Yet the persons through whose hands I passed contrived to despoil me of various articles. Verily war sharpens the faculties of all those engaged therein. . . .

" No sooner was I deposited in the brick-floored room than one of the Emerald Island beauties began her ' Whil-lallaboo och hone ' in such doleful accents

that I began to think that in her desire to hold a wake, she might hasten an event a little before my proper time in order to satisfy her wish. But I did injustice to the fair daughters of Erin by my unworthy suspicions for they were attentive and kind to me. . . .

"One of them explained in the tones of an Irish lament over the dead, 'I wonder, so I do, why you young gentlemen come out to the wars to be murthered entirely; and get such cruel tratement, when you might live at home so comfortably wid your friends.'

"'Ah!' responded the other charmer, 'it's a burning shame to see the gentry knocked into smithereens, and kilt outright; but it's always a goold chain or a wooden leg wid the quality.'

"The wooden leg was plain enough in my case; but the gold chain was not quite so obvious. . . .

"Immediately after the operation, I experienced a sensation as though a heavy weight was attached to my limb, which seemed to press it down with extreme force. This was probably occasioned by the regular circulation being disturbed. . . . I have never yet learned in what manner the circulation is carried on in the remaining portions of an amputated limb, or how the blood is returned to the heart. . . .

"I also felt a sensation as though the foot still retained its proper position. This sensation is occasionally felt many years after a limb has been amputated, as those who have lost arms or legs are well aware. I have sometimes experienced a sensation, and felt a painful twitch, as though my ankle or shin had been struck with a club. At other times I have felt as if my toes were jammed under a falling weight; and

when these pains suddenly occur, so violent are the sensations that the stump involuntarily jumps with spasmodic action. Can it be possible that the nerves, although much shortened, retain their full and original sensibility ? . . .

" Surgeons Halliday and Cooper . . . after a time came to see how I was getting on, and complimented me on the manner in which I had borne the operation. . . . After seeing that the tourniquet was in correct adjustment, the surgeons most kindly and cordially shook hands with me and took their departure to perform operations elsewhere. About an hour after the operation . . . I was again placed in a wagon, along with several other wounded soldiers, in order to proceed still further to the rear. . . .

" My only protection against the excessive cold of the coming night journey consisted of a little straw scattered over the bottom of the wagon, and my blanket, which I had all along carried strapped across my back since taking the field, and which was now unrolled and spread over me. . . .

" The road along which our convoy of wounded travelled, had been in many places cut up by the enemy in order to form entrenchments across it ; and these were very imperfectly levelled by us, when taken, to enable the artillery to pass over. The passage of the heavy siege guns had also damaged the road, so what with the joltings and the extreme cold, our sufferings were of no ordinary kind. . . . Every jolt seemed to tear my mangled limb to pieces, and the groans and cries of those around me were truly heartrending ; while the cold frosty night air benumbed every joint. The breath also, as it settled its moisture on the

blanket drawn closely around my throat, instantly became converted into ice, so that a congealed mass was formed close to my face and neck, and my moustache was likewise matted with an icy concretion. . . .

"After a tedious journey of some hours' duration . . . we stopped at a building by the road side. This we found was a temporary hospital, at which we were to rest for a short time. The pain, however, of being removed from the wagon was a sad draw-back to this necessary relief from confinement in a crowded vehicle. . . . A bed with sheets on it was, nevertheless, a luxury I had not known for some time; and after obtaining a cup of tea, and a little bread and butter. . . I fell fast asleep for a short time. . . .

"When I awoke, my faithful servant, John Hope, arrived with my portmanteau and a couple of fowls, which he had procured a day or two before. He had kept them dangling from his belts throughout the action of the previous day; and these now I proposed to make available for my fellow-sufferers in the apartment with me, six or seven in number. . . . My man Friday then set to work to strip the feathers from the birds, and in due course a palatable soup was prepared, and a portion given to each person in the room. . . .

"In the evening tea and bread and butter were again supplied to us . . . and shortly afterwards it was announced that a wagon awaited at the door for the purpose of conveying us still further to the rear. . . . As soon as all the vehicles were loaded with their living burthen, the convoy started. To describe the sufferings on this terrible night's journey would be no

easy undertaking. The agony caused by the jolting over the rugged roads, the intense cold, the painful constrained position in which each individual was packed, made it a night of horrors. Drifting snowflakes continually found their way through the imperfectly closed canvas awning . . . some of it settling on our faces and there freezing. . . .

" Why those journeys were undertaken during the night, I never could understand ; unless, indeed, it was for the purpose of avoiding the painful exhibition of parading through the country in open day a string of wagons loaded with human suffering. But surely this was not a valid reason for breaking the rest of, and torturing, men who required repose ? . . .

" At length, about daybreak, we arrived at another temporary hospital by the road side, where I was again laid on a bed, and allowed to remain undisturbed for the next thirty hours. I was then again placed in a wagon to resume our journey to the rear. . . .

" In the wagon were three other officers, two of whom, Lieut. Stowards and Ensign Chapman of the 37th Regiment, had lost a leg each . . . in a rather remarkable manner. The day after Merxem was taken, they were walking arm-in-arm along the *chausée* . . . when a cannon ball which had nearly spent its force came rolling towards them along the road. Another of the party called the attention of his companions to the circumstance, saying, ' See there, see there ! ' The words were scarcely uttered when the cannon ball was amongst them ; and as the two young officers were keeping step, it carried away the advanced foot of one, and the next moment the rear

foot of the other; so that one lost his right foot and the other one his left.

"Similar instances have occurred where men have endeavoured to stop a spent shot as they would a cricket ball, when a crushed foot or a mutilated hand has been the consequence. . . ."

At length in the small hours of Sunday, the 7th February, five days after he had received his wound, the convoy of disabled officers and men reached Williamstadt, where they were told comfortable wards had been prepared for their reception. "But as far off lands are proverbially considered to be the greenest, so it was found in this case that the reality did not answer the description. . . . I was placed on a stump bedstead in an upper apartment of the hospital, along with other sick and wounded officers; and to my great horror and disgust, I saw that the old German surgeon into whose hands I had been delivered was intoxicated, and his stupid and clumsy officiousness caused me much unnecessary pain. . . .

"When left to ourselves, I had some brief intervals of sleep, but towards daylight all the patients in our ward were aroused by torrents of water pouring down from the sieve-like roof which completely saturated our bedding. In vain did my servant drag my bedstead from one position to another in the hope to find a dry spot; but it was only escaping a shower-bath to fall under a cascade. A sudden thaw had set in with heavy rain, so the melting snow, together with the falling showers, had deluged our apartment. . . .

"At mid-day the surgeons visited the ward, and I was again tortured by the old German, who appeared

to me the most unfeeling brute I had ever encountered. Whether he had taken a dislike to me as I had to him, and thought, because I had seen him in a state of intoxication and accused him of his intemperance, that he would cause me all the pain in his power to inflict, I cannot say. . . . Later, a Deputy Inspector of Hospitals paid us a visit, and informed me, to my great delight, that a ward in a private house had been prepared for me and several other officers, to which we might be removed the following day if we so desired. . . .

"Here I found six beds prepared in a spacious apartment, the windows of which faced a garden behind the house. In the course of the day all the other beds became appropriated by new-comers. . . . All were strangers to me . . . but our common misfortunes, acting as a sort of Freemasonry, speedily brought about a very friendly and familiar interchange of inquiries and expressions of condolence. . . . Altogether, my position was an Elysium compared with the horrors endured during the previous few days. My stump was now properly dressed for the first time since the amputation had been performed; and it was found that the jolting and knocking about had caused the small bone of the leg to protrude beyond the fleshy surface—a circumstance which subsequently inflicted months of acute suffering before a cure could be effected. . . .

"The Dutch commandant of Williamstadt, who was a captain in the Dutch navy, was most kind and obliging. He had been a prisoner of war in England, and could speak English with considerable fluency, and amused us with many anecdotes connected with his captivity; such as baiting fish-hooks with barley

corns, and placing them in the vicinity of farm-yards situated within the boundary of his parole. He would chuckle at the recollection of his occasional success in hooking a fine turkey, goose, duck or fowl. The merry fellow visited us every morning to see how we got on, and to inquire what we would have for dinner, as his wife and other ladies of Williamstadt had organized a system for cooking our principal meal at each other's houses, and supplying us with vegetables by turns. . . .

"The system of dieting the sick and wounded, followed at Williamstadt, was founded of course on Red Tape and Routine. When in hospital, patients are allowed certain comforts, such as milk, arrow-root, etc., but as there was not sufficient hospital accommodation for all the sick and wounded officers, those who were of necessity in billets could not obtain any of the usual dietary of even a military hospital . . . so they only got bread and meat, sometimes fat salt pork, with hard biscuit; and nothing else from the Commissariat. . . .

"In a few days after settling down we became the merriest set of fellows in existence. Being young and endowed with exuberant animal spirits, we almost forgot the pain of our wounds in the uproarious mirth one or other in our ward was sure to set going. The Chaplain, good man, was somewhat startled on one occasion to find us singing 'Auld lang syne,' if not exactly in concert, in an energetic style that perhaps produced more noise than harmony. . . . The Chaplain gently rebuked us for not more seriously contemplating our dangerous position, all of which rebuke we felt to be deserved; but, like many other well-meant homilies, I am grieved

to say it had little effect on our subsequent merriment. . . .

"The Dutch commandant . . . having heard that I was a player on the flute, brought me an instrument with one key. With this flute I was enabled to puff forth, whilst lying on my back—a position from which I had not yet been able to move—a few of the popular airs of the day, to the great delight and amusement of my fellow-sufferers who sang vociferously to my accompaniment. In this manner time passed on till our mirth was checked for a brief interval through the death of one of our party. . . . This sad event cast a gloom over our little community, and caused each of us to think seriously of his own critical situation ; but young and ardent as we all were, the gloom soon passed away. . . .

"After I had been at Williamstadt a short time, Major-General Herbert Taylor, who was going on some mission to the Hague, came to see me, and assured me that I might rely on him as a friend, that he would do all in his power to promote my interest. At the same time he informed me that the Duke of Clarence had expressed himself in favourable terms relative to the part I had taken on our first advance to Merxem, and was well pleased with my conduct on that occasion. . . . In truth he said much more, to the same purport, than is considered desirable to relate here. Seated by my bedside, and conversing in the kindest manner, the general remained a full hour with me, and then, promising to see me again, proceeded on his mission.

"It was so very unusual a circumstance in those days for a general officer, and that officer holding a place of trust at Court, to visit a poor wounded subal-

tern, that all the occupants of our room were surprised at General Taylor's urbanity, and augured great things for me. But, alas! we did not then quite understand the working of our military system. . . . Yet I must in justice to the memory of Sir Herbert Taylor say that, if I failed in obtaining the promotion and reward which those who were acquainted with, or had personally witnessed, my services considered I was fairly entitled to expect, it was not that gallant officer's fault. . . . Nor will I accuse the Royal Duke of forgetfulness, as it was most probably official manœuvring that diverted his good intentions into other channels. . . .

"By way of breaking the monotony of our protracted confinement, the Dutch commandant occasionally brought in four or five young ladies to sing for our entertainment of an evening. Seated round a small table in the centre of the room, the damsels sang duets, glees, etc., for which we were greatly indebted to them. Among the then favourite songs, one of which, as we understood it, commenced 'Buonaparte is all capote,' was always the first performance. Another, 'Oranje boven, hurrah!' was also held in great estimation, and sung at every visit. Both songs were popular throughout Holland by all classes of the people. . . .

"Our friend the Dutch commandant was fond of practical jokes. . . . One day, taking advantage of my man's temporary absence, he told one of the female servants of the house that the surgeons had directed me to get up from my bed; but that I was 'crank in de coup' (mad), and refused to stir. She was therefore to lift me out of bed by force, whether I objected or not. My astonishment may be imagined

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when I saw this colossus of a woman, this huge Flanders mare . . . come alongside my bed and begin deliberately to strip off the bedclothes. In vain I protested against the act, and threatened in execrable French, and worse Dutch. I pointed to my mutilated limb, and even implored her to consider how great an injury her removing me might produce; but all to no purpose. Sentiment was not in her nature. The only response I could obtain from this leviathan of a woman to my entreaties, remonstrances and threats, was an incredulous laugh; and, pointing with her fore-finger to her forehead, she repeated, 'crank in de coup,' by way of letting me know she was well aware of my being an obstinate lunatic.

"Matters had arrived at a serious pitch; the Amazon had removed all the bedclothes, and already had me in her vice-like grasp, so that resistance in my helpless state seemed hopeless. I had seized hold of her, however, by the neck, and was endeavouring to prevent her lifting me from the bed, when, just as the Brobdignagian wench was about to draw me forth, the Dutch commandant . . . stepped out from behind the door and desired her to desist. As may be supposed, this scene produced much merriment in the room at my expense. . . .

"My commanding officer, the adjutant, and other brother-officers sent me gratifying letters from time to time . . . and Major MacAlester, who was an attached friend, considering that I must be in want of money, as no pay had been issued to the troops since their landing in December, contrived to get a month's pay for me, which he sent to Williamstadt. Though fully appreciating the kindness of the act, the money was of little use to me, lying on the broad

of my back. . . . However, I invested the greater part of the cash in Brussels lace, etc., as presents for my mother, sisters and other lady relatives. The Dutch commandant and his wife brought a vendor of lace and silk shawls to my bedside, the lady examining such pieces as suited my fancy, and recommending those which she considered of good quality; while her husband beat down the price. . . .

"Before long General Taylor paid me a second visit . . . and as he was on his way then to England he offered to take charge of, and present any memorial I might wish to forward. But I was not at that moment prepared to ask for anything in particular; and in the simplicity of my heart thought that something would be done for me without solicitation. . . .

"The inmates of our ward, with one exception, continued to improve in health daily, the exception being Lieut. Brown. For more than ten days after receiving his wound he appeared to suffer less than any of the other officers hit by the enemy's bullets, and joined in all our hilarity. But about the twelfth day a great change occurred for the worse. . . . The surgeons consulted day after day on his case, but all to no purpose. At length he became so prostrated that it required two men to raise him in bed. The probe was employed again and again . . . though the bullet had gone clean through him. . . . His bed was placed right across the foot of mine and, daily seeing the probe thrust into his wound, and the point issue from his back, caused me the most painful sensations. . . .

"At last one of the surgeons observed that the left shoulder was lower than the other . . . and it was discovered that the narrow neck of the scapula

. . . had been shot away. Bandages and suspenders were employed to ease the weight of the arm, and after a short time a visible, though exceedingly slow, improvement in general health followed. . . .

" The medical department at this period were sadly over-worked, and lamentably deficient in active and clever men. . . . Hospital assistants who had little theoretical knowledge, and less practice in their profession, were sent out to the army to mangle and torture the unfortunate fellows who fell into their hands. These inexperienced surgeons were known by the appellation of the ' Butchers' Boys.' A military wag once wrote over the door of one of these surgical bunglers, ' Mangling done here.'

" The protracted sufferings of poor Brown brought to mind the anecdote recorded of an officer who had been badly wounded in the knee. The surgeons laid open the part, causing intense anguish to the wounded man, who asked why they cut and carved him so cruelly. ' We are searching for the ball,' they replied.

" ' I wish you had told me that before, because I have it in my waistcoat pocket,' he calmly said.

" Then we had related the story of an Irish officer who was severely wounded in the head, so that when he inquired of the surgeons if they thought his wound would prove fatal, ' Yes,' said they, ' for we can see the brain.'

" ' Can you, by Jupiter ? Then I wish you would write and tell my father, for he always said that I had none.'

" The relation of one anecdote gave rise to another, and the following one may be relied on as authentic. An officer of the Royal Artillery was struck in the leg by a musket ball ; and as he was being carried to the

rear, a grape-shot hit him and extensively fractured the previously wounded limb. 'Thank God!' he exclaimed. 'There will be no need of a consultation about the propriety of amputation, now!'"

XII

The Siege of Antwerp

"AFTER the second capture of Merxem, on the 2nd February, 1814, the siege of Antwerp may be said to have formally commenced. . . . Soldiers of the line were told off to fill sandbags for constructing mortar and other batteries; the sappers and artillery afterwards adjusting them tier upon tier, until the required length, height and thickness were attained. The guns and mortars when placed in position commenced firing on the ships of war in the different docks, as well as on the works of the town generally. . . .

"It was found expedient to keep considerable bodies of troops under arms during the night of the 2nd February, and such regiments as had not on the previous day taken up the positions they were to occupy now moved into the positions assigned them. The town batteries reopened their fire at 6 a.m. on the 3rd and sent their iron showers in rapid succession on those points likely to inflict the greatest damage to the besiegers. . . .

"The siege was begun with most inadequate means as regards battering train and ammunition. Of rockets there were none; and these missiles only arrived after an armistice had been agreed upon. All ranks were, however, animated with a desire to destroy the

French fleet and capture the place. Five out of six Dutch guns employed in the batteries burst on the first and second days of the siege, the frost having probably acted on the metal and made it brittle. . . .

"The firing from the town increased in intensity as our batteries were completed in succession. Fortunately, Ferdinand's Dyke, which extended partly across the most exposed point occupied by the British, offered a friendly shelter for such of the men as were not on duty in the trenches . . . and by the evening many of the men had scooped out small caves in its sides, which not only screened them from the shot but also afforded protection from the cold frosty air that benumbed every joint. Fort Ferdinand, on the right, enfiladed to some extent the British advanced position; and commanded a considerable range of country to the north of Antwerp, as well as the river, close to which it is situated. . . .

"The regiments protecting the batteries were relieved every twenty-four hours, and then retired behind the village of Merxem, where they were less exposed to the enemy's fire; though a stray shot would even there occasionally boom in amongst a group of soldiers sitting round their watch-fire, and disturb the equanimity of the bivouac. . . .

"At this time one brigade occupied the village of Putten, and adjacent farm-houses and barns, about half-way between Antwerp and Bergen op Zoom; and thus prevented communication between the two places. . . .

"Fort Frederick Henry, on the bank of the Scheldt, having fallen into our possession, was occupied alternately by regiments belonging to the brigade at Putten. It was considered of great importance to hold this

fort, as it effectually prevented supplies being thrown into Bergen op Zoom by the river, or from that side. But there was no possibility of the troops occupying it getting cover, as the fort consisted principally of earthworks. They were much exposed, in consequence, to the severity of the cold. They contrived, however, by various means to keep themselves from being frost-bitten. . . .

" The fort is situated in a bend of the river formed by the Polder Dyke, about two miles from Fort Lille, which was still occupied by the enemy. Frederick Henry was merely an open battery with two embrasures, one of which was at right angles to the course of the river, and the other opened diagonally up the stream. A long 18-pounder was placed in the former, and a $5\frac{1}{2}$-inch howitzer in the second. But the two guns could not be brought to bear exactly in the same direction.

" On the 28th February, the 30th Regiment, with a detachment of artillery, were in occupation of this post . . . when at 7 a.m. a French ship of the line carrying eighty guns, and accompanied by several gun-boats, dropped down with the ebb tide from Antwerp, and anchored near the Flanders shore about five hundred yards from Fort Frederick ; and in such a position that the fire of the 18-pounder could not be brought against them. The first broadside from the line-of-battle ship tore up some of the sods about the work, but did no great damage to it. One ball, however, struck two men of the 30th, taking off both legs of one unfortunate fellow, and one leg from the other. . . .

" At 10 a.m. the 30th was relieved by the 73rd Regiment and all the men ordered to lie down ; but

a strict watch was kept to give timely notice in case the enemy attempted to land. From the bank of the river everything that was passing on board the ship and gun-boats could be plainly seen. . . . The bank of the river at this part is protected from inundation by the Polder Dyke, raised some sixteen to eighteen feet above the adjacent country . . . and in the contest between the ships and fort afforded considerable immunity from the shot, except to those who had to assist the artillery in working the guns. . . .

"The first few discharges from the ship appeared to have been delivered to ascertain the range, after which she opened fire in downright earnest. Broadside after broadside was poured in in rapid succession with the utmost precision—the gun-boats throwing their mite as a dessert to the more substantial favours from the larger vessel. The thunder of the guns shook the earth, the iron shower swept over and around the British battery; but our brave soldiers did not flinch from the unequal contest. . . .

"As it was impossible to stand continuously at the guns, our men crouched down during the delivery of each broadside; and then, springing to their feet from their recumbent posture, or from behind those portions of the earthwork which remained intact . . . they coolly poured their fire into the line-of-battle ship riding at anchor like a floating target. . . .

"After the conflict had been maintained for nearly five hours, the enemy ceased firing . . . and having had much the worst of it took advantage of the flood tide, slipped their cables, and returned to Antwerp. . . .

"It was found . . . that neither of the pieces of ordnance in the battery had been dismounted or

disabled ; and the casualties only amounted to two artillery men killed and one wounded, in addition to the two soldiers of the 30th previously mentioned. A few men of the 73rd were also injured by splinters and soil which were scattered about by the enemy's missiles. . . . The lands behind the fort, too, were furrowed and scored by the numerous cannon balls which had either buried themselves therein, or ricocheted from the surface. . . .

" It was subsequently ascertained that on board the French line-of-battle ship, forty-one men were killed or wounded, her commander being among the latter. The ship itself received considerable damage, both in the hull and rigging. . . .

" The fact that the British battery was neither destroyed nor the guns silenced proves that earthworks, though not so imposing to the eye, or so formidable in appearance, as regularly constructed fortifications, are in reality about the best kind of construction that has yet been devised for defence. . . . Had it been possible to have brought the 18-pounder as well as the howitzer to bear on the French ship, her loss in killed and wounded, and material damage, would of course been much greater. . . .

" No sooner had the enemy retired from before the battery than the inhabitants of Sandvliet, a town some short distance from the scene of action, came with a liberal supply of ' schnapps ' as a present to the troops. Of this a considerable number of foolish fellows drank so freely that they became unfit for duty. This ill-timed present was kindly meant, but unfortunately it was the cause of severe punishment to some of those who drank of it to excess ; for the next day several men of the 73rd were tried for being

drunk on duty, and received corporal punishment. . . .

"Some strong defences were now constructed close to Fort Frederick, especially on the side towards Lille, not far from which fort our advanced sentries were posted on the dyke which extended from fort to fort. A formidable obstacle was placed across the dyke to protect those in front from a sudden rush, for the French sentries were posted at some distance from their own fort, and within sight of those of the British. . . .

"During the siege of Antwerp, the fire from the enemy's batteries swept over a part of the British position with such fury that it was not deemed expedient to expose the soldiers to its destructive effects, unless imperative necessity required it. In order, however, to supply the men in the advanced batteries with ammunition and provisions, parties were sent out at intervals with these, taking advantage of the least cessation of the enemy's fire to pass the exposed spot.

"On one occasion General Taylor was standing, in the dusk of the evening, near the dangerous pass, and observed a soldier hesitate to cross the exposed place at a moment when the general considered the enemy's fire had slackened sufficiently to pass with some chance of escape. Accordingly, General Taylor said, 'Now, my man, is the time. You had better move on.'

"As the general was muffled up in his grey great-coat, the soldier did not recognize the rank of the person who addressed him, and turning round replied, with the most complete nonchalance, 'Stop a bit, old man; I'm not in such a hurry as you be.'

"On the 9th March intelligence was brought in to Williamstadt that, on the previous evening, a part

of the army had secretly and suddenly broken up their position from before Antwerp, and made an unexpected attack on Bergen op Zoom, which place had been captured. This news of the success of our brethren-in-arms caused great joy to those of us undergoing painful confinement . . . and was fully credited. For it was known that a staff officer, who had seen the troops enter the renowned fortress, and establish themselves on the ramparts, had duly reported these facts as he rode to a distant part of the British position . . . and the news spread like wild-fire through the army. . . .

" As the mail was about leaving Williamstadt for England, letters already written and sealed were again opened, and the gratifying intelligence inserted by way of postscript. In the midst, however, of our jubilation some visitors, whose gloomy looks betokened sad tidings, entered our room ; and we soon learned that the attack on Bergen op Zoom had failed through the operation being entrusted to the command of a brave but incompetent leader. There was but one opinion throughout the army as to the total want of military knowledge unfortunately displayed on the occasion. . . .

" In the afternoon of the 9th a flag of truce came into Williamstadt from Bergen op Zoom, demanding surgical aid for the numerous wounded men who remained prisoners in the hands of the enemy. Accordingly, all the surgeons except two or three were at once dispatched to the scene of disaster. . . .

" Subsequently I had ample opportunities of learning from those who were present at the assault the causes which had led to the lamentable failure of the attack, an operation which at its commencement

promised such brilliant results, and appeared already to have added one more laurel wreath to those previously won by the British Army. . . .

"The following account of the attack on Bergen op Zoom was chiefly derived from officers and men of all arms, who were actively engaged in, or witnessed, the operation; and though a plain narrative of facts relating to our discomfiture may be galling to our national pride, it is better to exhibit the naked truth in all its bearings, that we may profit by knowing the worst, rather than to varnish it over and stifle it under a mass of verbiage. . . .

"To be aware of our own ignorance is the first step to knowledge; and if incapable men are praised for doing badly they, in their deep-rooted self-conceit, never attain even this the first rudimentary step to improvement. If history teaches by example, we do wrong by not narrating the unvarnished truth, even at the expense of our insular pride. . . ."

XIII

The Disaster at Bergen op Zoom

'BEFORE narrating the principal facts connected with the assault on Bergen op Zoom, it will perhaps be well to give a brief account of that renowned stronghold, by which means the operations against it will be better understood.

"Bergen op Zoom, the strongest fortress in Dutch Brabant, is situated on a gentle eminence slightly elevated above the low swampy ground in its vicinity, and at some distance from the eastern branch of the Scheldt. Excepting along the dykes, there is no firm footing for man or beast in those extensive marshes. Nothing but a bird, or a web-footed creature, can pass over the quaggy surface. The small river Zoom runs through the town, whence it derives its name of the 'Hill,' or 'Town on the Zoom.'

"Cohorn, the great Dutch engineer, displayed consummate skill and ingenuity in adding works of defence to the place. Redoubts, bastions, galleries under the ramparts, and mines beyond them, with extensive earthwork defences, make it one of the strongest fortresses in the world; and it has been pronounced impregnable by force—that is by open and direct attack. The side towards Antwerp is further strengthened by the small and sluggish river Escaut; and its water communication with the Scheldt would

enable succour to be brought into the town, even when closely besieged. Several powerful forts intervene between the main part of the fortress and the Scheldt.

"Such was the strength of Bergen op Zoom that it baffled two of the greatest generals of their times: the Duke of Parma, who unsuccessfully besieged it in the year 1588; and the Marquis Spinola, who was compelled to raise the siege in 1622, after losing the best part of his army. In 1747 it was taken, after an investment of nearly three months, by Count Lowendhall; or rather, was betrayed into his hands by the treachery, or stupidity, of the Dutch governor, the old Baron de Constrom. . . . Whether it is just to accuse the Dutch governor of a wilful and culpable dereliction of duty . . . or whether the success was entirely owing to the ardour and bravery of the besiegers, it is not easy at the present day to determine. . . .

"In humiliating contrast to the success of the French in 1747, who, making good their ground in a single ravelin, forced the Dutch garrison to surrender, stands the fact that in 1814 a British force, more than twice as numerous as the garrison opposed to them, gallantly won their way into the place and gained possession of more than two-thirds of the defences; established themselves on the ramparts, held possession of the market-place, and one of the gates of the town, where a guard was posted; and yet were afterwards not only forced to relinquish all they had gained by their bravery, but a body outnumbering the whole force of the garrison surrendered as prisoners of war. The British were, in fact, at one time masters of the place had they but known how to secure their conquest. . . .

" The siege of Antwerp had made but little progress owing to our deficient battering train ; and it was all but suspended until the breaking up of the frost, and the arrival of guns and stores from England which could not be landed till the rivers and harbours were clear of ice. It was a point of great importance, therefore, to the British to obtain possession of Bergen op Zoom as a place of strength in case of reverses.

" The French had upwards of 12,000 troops in Antwerp ; their communication with Lille was open, the Prussians having withdrawn after the affair at Oudenarde on the 6th March. Consequently the enemy could receive reinforcements from that quarter, and advance with a very superior force against the small army under Sir Thomas Graham, which, in the event of being pressed by overwhelming numbers, would have had no alternative but to submit to the mortification of retiring upon their transports. And these were frozen in at Williamstadt, the only fortified place in their possession besides Tholen, which was on an island separated from them by a branch of the Scheldt.

" These good and sufficient reasons, and the ascertained fancied security in which the French garrison of Bergen op Zoom rested, combined with the knowledge that its inhabitants were favourably disposed to the British, induced Sir Thomas Graham to direct his attention to the means of obtaining possession of that fortress. The plan he formed to ensure its capture was judicious ; and had his selection of an officer to lead and direct the operation been equally so, and his plan properly carried out, success must have crowned the enterprise. In brief, the design was admirably conceived by the General-in-Chief,

but execrably conducted by his subordinate. . . .

"On the 8th March, the troops destined for the assault were quietly withdrawn from before Antwerp and other points, and directed to occupy the villages and barns at a short distance from Bergen op Zoom, and to keep as close as circumstances would permit until the hour for attack arrived. The time was well chosen for the assault; the moon was low in the heavens, and as one column was to assail the fortress by the bed of the River Zoom, it was calculated that the tide would be out at the moment of attack; so no difficulty was to be apprehended on that account. . . .

"Soon after 8 p.m. . . . the troops were formed into four columns at their allotted stations, the whole under command of Major-General George Cooke. The first column, under command of Major-General Skerrit and Brigadier-General Gore, was to enter the fortress by the bed of the river Zoom. This accomplished, it was to turn to its right on quitting the bed of the stream, and proceed along the ramparts to aid the other columns in gaining an entrance. . . .

"The second column was to escalade the Pucelle bastion, upon the Antwerp front. This point was selected on account of the inundations from the Scheldt being retained by a *batardeau* (coffer-dam) opposite its flanked angle; and because the three bastions in rear of the inundation, not being revetted, were more easily assailed. If the ice should be found sufficiently firm (as it was supposed to be), the unrevetted bastions would in all probability be taken without much difficulty. But if the ice should prove to be too weak to bear the troops, then the assault was to be made on the dry side of the *batardeau*.

"A third column was to enter by escalade upon the

Wouw front; and a fourth column, which was only intended to act as a feint, was to attract the attention of the enemy to the Steenbergen gate and adjacent works. Sir George Hoste led one of the columns which was composed of the Guards.

"The columns which assaulted by the bed of the River Zoom, and the Pucelle bastion, were successful. One of these columns entered the fortress without difficulty and without loss; and the other with the loss of six or seven men only. The column which was to have escaladed on the Wouw side found the enemy ready to repel the attack, and was prevented entering the fortress at that point; but without sustaining any serious loss, its casualties not exceeding thirty men. This column was then led to the foot of the Pucelle bastion; and, following the party which had by that time obtained possession of this and the adjacent bastions, the troops mounted the ladders and formed up on the ramparts.

"Up to this period everything had succeeded, even beyond the expectation of the most sanguine. The difficulties of the fortifications had all been surmounted, and the capture of the renowned Bergen op Zoom seemed certain—in fact, was already accomplished. Not only were the three columns intended for the assault within the fortress, but the column destined to make the false attack on the Steenbergen gate, after occupying the attention of the garrison, and drawing a part of its force away from the other points assaulted, contrived to enter the fortress also. All that was now required to bring the assault to a successful termination was to summon the garrison to surrender; and, if they refused to submit, to move with overwhelming numbers against them.

"But, strange to relate, no summons was sent to the enemy. This simple step was altogether neglected, although the French garrison, under the command of General Bizanet, finding a vastly superior force within the place and on the ramparts, against which they could not hope to contend with any chance of success, had hastily been collected in one of the bastions, and there awaited an expected summons to surrender. According to a subsequent statement of their own officers, they were ready to submit at once, as it was considered the place was irretrievably lost.

"Finding the British inactive, however, and astonished at the supineness of their opponents, as no obstacle existed to prevent them at once deciding the contest, the garrison began to entrench themselves. From being in a state almost amounting to dismay, they became confident; and through the skill of their general, as opposed to the ignorance of the British leader, finally obtained the superiority.

"It sounds scarcely credible, but when our troops were established on the ramparts, with no intervening obstacle to prevent them attacking their opponents, nothing was done beyond sending out detachments of two hundred to two hundred-and-fifty men from Lord Probyn's column. . . . These detachments were able to traverse more than four-fifths of the ramparts without opposition; but coming in contact with the assembled garrison they were, as a matter of course, driven back by superior numbers. And yet this miserable game was played over and over again—enough of itself to dispirit the troops, and shake all confidence in themselves. . . .

"General Cooke, for what purpose it is difficult to imagine, left the ramparts with the Guards, and de-

scended to the market-place, an open square in the town ; and there he remained as equally inactive as the troops he had left on the works. It has been asserted that the British general suspended operations, waiting for daylight ; but nothing was to be gained by delay. Instant action was the only proper course. The general who hesitates, when the moment for action has arrived, has already lost the battle. In war, moments of time often produce great results. . . .

" Time wore on and no steps were taken to proceed in earnest against the enemy. Some few men, benumbed by the intense cold, and dispirited by inactivity, and considering also that the place was captured, left their ranks and entered the streets in search of spirit stores. In fact, there was no controlling head to direct. Everything appears to have been left to blind chance. . . .

" Lieut. Ralph, a brave officer of the 37th Regiment, with about fifty men under his command, traversed more than two-thirds of the ramparts without opposition. He reported the circumstance to the senior officer of the works, and requested spikes, with which to spike the guns and thus prevent them being used against the British ; or, as an alternative, suggested that a stronger force might be sent to occupy some of the batteries which had been found undefended. To these reasonable and very proper suggestions, he received the curt reply, ' Join your regiment, sir.' Snubbed for his interference, he did as he was ordered and remained with his regiment until the final catastrophe. . . .

" When the French realized that little or nothing was being done to compel them to submit, they began to concert measures for defence, or aggression, as cir-

cumstances might arise. Accordingly, a strong party crept stealthily down from the bastion where their main force was stationed, and entered the houses around the market-place where General Cooke, with the Guards, stood supinely inactive—waiting for daylight. . . .

"It may here be stated that the head of the column which assaulted by the bed of the Zoom turned to the right, as directed; whilst the rear committed a most unaccountable error by turning to its left, and thus the two portions became separated. This mistake would never have arisen had the officer commanding the column communicated, to all regimental commanders, precise instructions on the subject, before entering the fortress. . . .

"Some time after the Zoom column had so inopportunely become divided, that portion which had taken a wrong direction found, by the rising of the tide, that they were cut off from all support and completely isolated. But as the French were, at first, in a state of confusion, this detachment remained unmolested for a considerable time. Then the enemy, having rallied, attacked this force with superior numbers and compelled it to surrender. This, however, could have had no material effect on the general result; for the British troops still in the very heart of the fortress were more than double the number of the garrison opposed to them. . . .

"About the time of this reverse, the French who had occupied the houses around the market-place, attacked the Guards with considerable animation; and being posted with great judgment fired from the windows with deadly effect; whilst they themselves remained in comparative security. Why an attempt was

not made to force the houses and expel the enemy, I could never learn ; or why the Guards, upwards of a thousand strong, should have surrendered, is not very clear ; since the portion of the garrison brought against them could hardly have been superior in numbers. If we may judge from the following incident, no absolute necessity appears to have existed for their submission.

" At the moment the Guards and General Cooke surrendered, Sergeant Townsend stepped out of the ranks, saying to the soldiers around him that ' he'd be d——d if he would lay down his arms,' and asking, ' Are there any men here who will follow me ? '

" Thirteen men stepped forth from the ranks and placed themselves under his direction ; and with this little band of brave fellows he crossed the square upon which the enemy had established a cross-fire. After expending all their ammunition in clearing a way, he and his gallant comrades escaped unscathed from the town. This man received neither promotion nor reward . . . but many years afterwards the Duke of Wellington, who had been made acquainted with his history, appointed him Steward and Porter of Walmer Castle, of which his Grace was Lord Warden. . . .

" On the ramparts, as in the town, the same unaccountable absence of action appears to have prevailed. . . . Had there been one man of genius and courage to direct, even after General Cooke and the Guards had surrendered . . . the fortunes of the contest might have been retrieved. . . . But nothing appears to have been done, either for defence or attack. Not even the precaution of strongly occupying houses in commanding situations, or at salient points, was adopted ; by which means the position of the troops on the ramparts would have been materially strength-

ened, and the enemy restricted in his movements.

"Through a series of errors and mismanagements, the regiments at length became so detached and disconnected that a state of complete disorganization was reached; and the assailants became in turn the assailed. A panic followed, when a rush was made to escape from an enemy still inferior in numerical strength, but vastly superior as regards unity of action, and resources as exigencies arose. Prompt to take advantage of blunders . . . the enemy, when once in the ascendant, gave no time to consider if the contest could be protracted. He did not dawdle away the time, that all-precious element in war, nor throw away a single chance that might lead to success. . . .

"The French recovered bastion after bastion, which had been in our possession for eight or nine consecutive hours. Generals Gore and Skerrit were killed; the ranks of different regiments became intermingled in one incoherent and disorderly mass, and a stream of men precipitated itself over the works, and were shot down in heaps by repeated discharges of grape-shot, musketry, and *mitraille*. The very guns that Lieut. Ralph had recommended to be spiked were now turned with deadly effect on the disordered fugitives, who were flying in every direction. Day had now dawned, and the aim of the French artillery was so unerring that their fire literally mowed down whole ranks of the unfortunate victims to our system of selecting favourites for command. . . .

"The 33rd Regiment, even after the Guards had surrendered in the town, and the total discomfiture of the troops on the works, continued to hold possession of the Waterport gate to the last. The regiment was formed in open columns of sub-divisions, expecting to

receive orders to move in support of the force on the ramparts . . . but there they remained without orders. Having disposed of the other portions of the British troops, the enemy at length turned their attention to this, the last force that remained intact. Bringing up some guns loaded with langridge they opened such a destructive fire upon the regiment that the very first discharge swept down Captain Guthrie and the whole of the front sub-divisions of the Grenadiers with one exception, a covering sergeant. Colonel Elphinstone then gave the word of command to face about, and the column retired in good order, leaving the town in possession of its original garrison. . . ."

" The day had dawned ; but where was the British general who had spent the hours of night unprofitably waiting for its approach ? He was a prisoner in the hands of those who should have been his captives. A witness of the degradation of his soldiers, he had the mortification to see a body of his men, more numerous than their opponents, disarmed and made prisoners of war ; to behold the epaulettes torn, with every mark of contumely, from the shoulders of many British officers. And greater mortification still, he was a spectator of a triumphant procession round the ramparts and through the town, which his own division had occupied for nine hours ; in which procession, too, the captured colours of five or six British regiments were conspicuously exhibited with all the display and effect our opponents so well knew how to produce. . . .

" Yet, at one period of the night, so sure did every individual of the attacking force feel that the fortress was captured, that many officers, believing they were to be stationed therein, had fixed on certain houses for their quarters, and chalked their names on the doors.

"Colonel MacAlester, at the time major, commanding the 2nd Battalion 35th Regiment, which corps occupied Wouw on the night of the attack, made the following statement:

"'The night was dark and cold. About midnight . . . an A.D.C., passing through the village (Wouw), acquainted us that everything had succeeded *à merveille*—that the fortress had been surprised and captured with very little loss; and that the 2nd Division, under General Cooke, had then quiet possession of the walls. He added, "You may therefore turn in your men, and go to supper."

"'They then turned into the neighbouring houses and began to make themselves at home. Suddenly a horseman rode swiftly past the door, the bugle sounded, the cry of "turn out" was heard on all sides, and every man rushed at once to the alarm post. Something had happened; nobody knew what. We were ordered to move directly upon Bergen op Zoom. Onward, therefore, we went for three or four miles, without meeting a soul who could give us the slightest information as to the cause of our being so hastily and unexpectedly summoned. Presently we were stopped by a staff officer, who said to me, "Things are going badly. The general wishes to speak to you."

"'I then followed my leader; and in a small field, touching the glacis of Bergen op Zoom, beheld the gallant Graham, steadily gazing upon the walls of the fortress, occasionally stamping his foot with violence upon the ground; whilst tears, I afterwards perceived, had been stealing down his furrowed cheeks, denoting the conflicting nature of his feelings. He did not notice my approach until I said to him, "General, shall I enter the town?"

" ' " It is too late, sir," he replied, " Look there ! " Turning my eyes in the direction to which he pointed, I observed a stream of men rushing out of one of the gates at no great distance from the spot where we stood ; and others scrambling down, and even throwing themselves from the walls on each side of it, seemingly without cause, as no discharge of cannon or musketry immediately followed them.

" ' " Form across the road," continued the general. " Remember there are no other troops at hand. If the enemy follows, you must defend yourselves HERE to the last man."

" ' The mass that reached us a few minutes afterwards was a confused jumble of the remains of several regiments. Let it suffice to say they passed through us, and what became of them after, I know not. We held our ground for several hours unmolested, and then retired by order. I saw no reason at the time why the walls should have been so precipitately abandoned. Ten minutes more and five hundred British soldiers would have stood between the retiring column and the enemy, and afforded them breathing time. My impression at the time was that the troops wanted a leader. Such, indeed, was the general impression. General Cooke, with the entire 2nd Division of the Army, had quiet and undisturbed possession of the ramparts, and the greater portion of the town . . . for six or eight hours, during which period, it is said, the enemy stood prepared to surrender at discretion when called upon to do so.'

" Such was the opinion of an eye-witness, an officer who had seen much and varied service, and which opinion coincided with that of every officer and man in the Army of Holland.

"Never in the annals of England had a British army suffered such a reverse as this. Even General Whitlock and his miserable tactics in America did not leave a deeper stain on Britain than did the disaster at Bergen op Zoom. Yet no one suffered disgrace, or even loss of promotion for their delinquency. . . .

"The indignation of both officers and men was unbounded . . . and they attributed the whole blame of the failure to the want of an intelligent energetic leader. . . . There was no slur cast on General Cooke for want of personal bravery, but a strong and decided opinion was entertained as to his demerits as a leader of troops. . . .

"In this unfortunate affair upwards of two thousand efficient British soldiers surrendered as prisoners of war to an inferior numerical force; but they were in a few days released on condition that they did not serve for twelve months against the French Emperor. . . .

"These observations are made without acrimony or ill-feeling to anyone, for I have endeavoured to wield the pen of truth with impartiality. . . . We were fairly out-generalled and disgracefully beaten. Therefore it is but honest to acknowledge the humiliating defeat in all its naked deformity. . . .

"Nothing can be more distasteful to a feeling mind than that of recording the demerits of an officer who subsequently did good service under the command of the Duke of Wellington, at Waterloo, where General Cooke lost an arm. But there is a wide difference between exercising command, and directing the movement of troops, to that of acting under the orders and directions of another. One is an original effort of the mind; whilst the other is an almost mechanical obedience to the superior intellect of genius. . . .

" When the English public heard of the disaster at Bergen op Zoom, they wished for an inquiry into the circumstances connected with the failure ; and, in dismay at our frightful loss, the more sanguine exclaimed, ' Whom shall we hang ? ' . . . No inquiry was instituted, however, at this time, for the triumphs of Wellington in the south reconciled the public in some measure to the defeat at Bergen op Zoom, and diverted their attention to other stirring events in progress. . . ."

XIV

Home

"ABOUT the third day after the disaster at Bergen op Zoom, our chaplain, who had proceeded to bury the dead, returned from Wouw. . . . Among other things, he told us that he had on the previous day committed to its mother earth the remains of the finest young man he had ever seen. On hearing this I experienced a strange unaccountable sensation, which immediately impelled me to say, 'The young officer you allude to was Henry Miles of the 1st or Royal Regiment,' for my thoughts instantly turned on my friend, although at the moment I had not heard that he was among the slain.

"The chaplain replied that my surmise was correct. He described Henry Miles as being the most perfect model of a man he had ever seen, and he had at Wouw a large field for comparison, as several hundred naked bodies were laid in juxtaposition with each other, and filled one huge grave or trench. It was said that a placid smile rested, even in death, on Miles's manly and handsome features, with little appearance of that languor which mostly marks the countenances of those who die by gun-shot wounds. . . .

"I afterwards learned that during the mêlée on the ramparts my friend received a musket ball in one of his legs, and while he sat up endeavouring to stanch the

blood with his sash, at the same time animating his men to the contest, another bullet struck him near the right eyebrow, and penetrating the skull killed him on the instant.

" I felt much concern on hearing the particulars connected with the death of my friend, who was a noble young soldier and an ornament to the regiment in which he was a Lieutenant. . . . Having from an early age been addicted to versifying, I composed at the time of the Bergen op Zoom disaster some lines on the death of my friend, which ran as follows :

The birds are chirping in the trees,
The leaves are rustling in the breeze,
The busy hum of men is heard
Above the sound of leaf or bird ;
It is the struggling world awaking
To daily toil, for day is breaking ;
Haste ! ere the sun's bright rays ascend.

But one still calmly slumbers here,
No sound falls on this sleeper's ear ;
There is a silence none can break,
A sleep that morn can ne'er awake.
A gloom that sun can ne'er make bright.
That sleep is death, that gloom its night :
Such sleep is thine, my gallant friend.

" On the same day that the chaplain returned from his melancholy duty, we had an accession to our numbers by the arrival of two of the sufferers from Bergen op Zoom—Captain Nicholson, 56th Regiment, and Lieut. Campbell, 91st Regiment. The first-named was wounded when retiring from the ramparts, a grape-shot passing right through his neck in an oblique direction, yet without injuring any important vessel, to the great astonishment of all the medical men who saw the wound.

. . . In the general rush from Bergen op Zoom, on being shot down he had been passed over by his men; but his soldier servant, a loutish-looking English country bumpkin, on finding that his master had been left behind, returned through a murderous fire and succeeded in bringing him away to a place of safety. . . .

"Lieut. Campbell had received no less than five wounds, one of which was in the leg, one in the arm, two in the body, and the fifth in the head. This officer was also struck down as he was escaping from Bergen op Zoom. The wound in the head he received whilst his men were carrying him away from the scene of slaughter. . . .

"Captain Nicholson and Lieut. Campbell, after long and severe suffering, recovered from their dangerous wounds; and when I met Captain Nicholson in London, twelve months after receiving his injury, he had not even a stiff neck . . . or any outward sign beyond the scar to indicate that he had been wounded at all. . . .

"By the latter end of March I had sufficiently recovered to be able to crawl about on crutches for a few moments at a time. . . . As the frost now began to break up and the ice present indications of floating out of the rivers and harbours, a vessel was fitted up and made ready to sail with invalids for England. The Inspector of Hospitals offered me a passage in this ship, the *Urania*, of which offer I gladly availed myself. . . .

"My servant procured a rattle-trap kind of gig, into which I mounted, and my man taking hold of one shaft, and a Dutch blacksmith the other, I was drawn in state through the streets to the water side. Here a boat was soon secured and I was conveyed, though at

some risk from floating ice, to the good ship, then lying at anchor off Williamstadt. . . .

" When I arrived on board I found the cabin unoccupied ; the master was on shore, and none of the passengers, except sick and wounded soldiers, had as yet embarked. At dusk, however, a good-humoured rollicking Irish hospital assistant, who was to take charge of the invalids, came on board with the master of the transport ; and soon after Captain Guthrie, of the 33rd Regiment and a wounded surgeon joined us in the cabin. There were between one and two hundred wounded soldiers on board, most of whom were on their way to Chelsea to get pensioned off. . . . There were likewise three or four women, with several children, who had by some means contrived to get out to their husbands. . . .

" The following day, the 1st April, the *Urania* prepared for sea. A leaden-coloured sky and moaning wind betokened a rough passage ; while the waves dashed in rapid succession against the ship's bow and sides. . . . The anchor weighed, the *Urania* slowly passed down the Haring Vliet, through fields of floating ice, to Helveotsluys, where we anchored for the night. . . .

" As it was still daylight . . . some of our party landed and walked about the island of Voorn, on which Helveotsluys is situated. . . . But I cautioned my fellow-passengers to be on their guard against hotel extortions, relating the anecdote about ' Eggs at Helveotsluys ' as follows : George the First of England, having been frequently victimized by the rapacity of the Dutch at Helveotsluys, was resolved to avoid it by not stopping there during one of his journeys. While the servants were changing their horses and adjusting his luggage in the coach, he stopped at the

door of the principal hotel and asked for three fresh eggs. Having eaten these, he inquired what he was to pay for them. 'Two hundred florins,' was the reply. 'How!' cried the astonished monarch, 'Why so much? Eggs are not scarce at Helveotsluys.' 'No,' replied the landlord, 'Eggs are not scarce here, but kings are.' . . .

"We were to have sailed with the first of the ebb tide in the morning, but our Dutch pilot purposely delayed until mid-day, alleging there would be plenty of water over the sandbanks at that hour, but the skipper doubted it and urged an earlier start, though he failed to move the phlegmatic pilot who had his own reasons for not proceeding to sea before the hour he named. . . .

"At twelve the anchor was weighed, and we set sail with a spanking breeze in our favour; but before we had cleared the shoals which render the coast of Holland so dangerous to mariners . . . the ship, rising over a lofty swelling wave and then plunging downwards, suddenly struck heavily on a sandbank off the island of Goree, and in a moment was stopped in her course with all her sails set.

"The crash of the floating ice against the ship, the hoarse roar of the sea, the howling of the wind through the rigging, the screams of the women and children, and the shouting and cursing of the sailors, rendered the scene a peculiarly impressive one. The captain, in a wild state of excitement at the prospect of losing the ship, cursed and swore at the pilot in true nautical fashion; first, threatening to throw him overboard for having delayed sailing till the last of the ebb; and then declaring he would take him to England, if the ship got off, and punish him there; and, finally, vowing

"WEIGHT FOR AGE"—AN OFFICER'S RACE
(Drawn by Major Thomas Austin)

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that he would not pay him one farthing for pilotage.

" When beating on the bank, the snow-white foam was borne aloft from the huge waves, as their crests rose to the gale, and thrown in scattered showers over the ship. And as each successive squall struck her, she careened over gunwale deep in the sea, quivering and groaning at every bump on the bank. She was completely at the mercy of the wind and waves, which threatened every instant to break her to pieces. Again recovering her upright position, the gallant bark appeared as if coming up to her courses, and as though she would forge over the bank ; but the next instant another heavy wave would strike her powerless once more, and cause her to tremble in every plank from deck to keel. . . .

" At length she moved forward a foot or two, and then plunged and bumped heavily again and again ; but another rising wave sent her onward somewhat further than the first forward impulse had done. We now began to hope that we might plough our way over the bank, when all of a sudden, as if a crowning effort had been made for our destruction, a stronger squall and heavier sea struck the ship and seemed to overwhelm her. But instead, it released her, and as the squall passed over we found ourselves once more afloat. I can only compare our joy at this happy deliverance to that described in the fine old song, ' The Bay of Biscay '—' She rights, she rights, boys ; we're off shore.'

" When the *Urania* first struck I was standing on the deck, looking at some pilots who, at a short distance from us, were endeavouring to take soundings ; not with the line and lead, but with a long graduated rod which they pushed down over the side of their boat. . . .

The concussion was so violent that it knocked my crutches from under me, and threw me forward with considerable force, so that the crown of my stump came in forcible contact with the deck. There I remained seated until the danger of shipwreck was over; when the young surgeon repaired the damage done to my limb as well as he could, by stopping the hemorrhage and applying fresh bandages. . . .

"Fairly afloat again, our first care was to see to the pumps, which happily worked freely and indicated only a trifling degree of leakage. So we once more resumed our voyage with every prospect of a short run; and dismissed the pilot who had delayed our sailing, and thereby risked the loss of the ship, merely in order that his boat, which had been taken out by its crew on a fishing expedition, might have time to return and take him home on the flood tide. . . ."

"Whilst on board the *Urania*, I learnt much in confirmation of my account of the Bergen op Zoom affair from Captain Guthrie, who was grievously wounded in the face when in command of the Grenadiers, 33rd Regiment. His description fully corroborated all that I have related concerning that disgraceful defeat. . . .

"Before daylight on the following morning we arrived off the coast of Suffolk, and fired a gun as a signal for a pilot, one of whom came aboard; and by daybreak we were beating up for the Thames. As we had not of late seen the English Journals, we naturally inquired of our pilot the news of the day; but that unsophisticated amphibious creature appeared not to care how the world wagged, provided he had full employment. To our inquiry as to the latest news he replied, 'Well, I don't know any, except that

corn be mortal dear, and old Dame Jobson be dead at last.' And this stoical indifference to great events was expressed at a time when Europe was convulsed to its centre, and half a million of soldiers were in arms and arrayed by the Allied powers contending against France. . . .

" Although but a brief time absent from England we were delighted to find ourselves again in sight of our native land, with its variable climate, its lights and shades ; and yet with all its drawbacks, its superiority over that of Holland in the winter season was manifest. As our ship beat against the wind, the sun shone through the irregular openings between the clouds, and dotted the dark green sea with spots of silvery brightness, like so many bright spots on memory's waste. As the clouds passed on, these bright spots shifted and changed their positions continually, imparting brightness and shadow alternately on the heaving ever-moving waves ; while the ships, the boats, and objects on the distant shore, told us of peaceful homes of active commerce, and of an energetic seafaring coast population.

" After beating up to windward for some time, we entered the Thames ; but as the breeze had died away, and the ebb tide was against our further progress, we anchored for the night. On the following morning we again made tedious way up the river with the first of the flood tide to Deptford. The voyage had occupied five days and, all things considered, was reckoned a favourable one, the distance run being between fifty and sixty leagues.

" Duly landed at Deptford, I proceeded to the house of a relative in town, there to nurse my wounds and endeavour to cure an obstinate attack of jaundice,

which for a long time baffled the skill of my medical adviser. My stump still required the application of bluestone (sulphate of copper); and a place about the size of a half-crown piece over the small bone of the leg, which had more than once been laid bare by the joltings I had been subjected to, and subsequent accidents on board ship, remained unhealed until the following September. The pain arising from this small and apparently insignificant source was so acute that for many weeks I was unable to sleep, except for occasional brief uneasy slumbers during the day. On lying down at night my sufferings immediately became excessive, and continued without intermission till the morning, when the pain partially and gradually died away—only to be renewed with increased violence on the return of night. None of the medical men whom I consulted could account for the nocturnal torments which I endured; but I always considered that lying in a recumbent position had something to do with it. . . .

"Like most men who have lost a leg, and who study appearance more than comfort, I became desirous to get an artificial limb as a substitute for the lost one; but after employing at great expense one of those London manufacturers of mechanical contrivances, who profess to remedy all defects, I found that the common wooden, or Jack Hatchway, leg is the best and most useful. In fact, no artificially formed leg to imitate the natural limb would stand the work which my active habits required of it. . . .

"I afterwards constructed from my own idea two artificial legs, popularly termed 'cork legs,' with which cork has nothing to do; and although I could walk exceedingly well in a room, or on smooth ground,

with my improved contrivance, such legs are not suitable for rough work. . . . Finding the springs, which move the foot, continually giving way, I finally gave up using the artificial leg ; and have since been enabled with the more homely-looking wooden pin to get through a long day's shooting, or a geological ramble over mountainous districts, or along the rugged rocky, slippery shore, covered with marine plants, as well as to make excursions on horse-back to distant scenes of interest.

" Dean Swift asserted that,

> Without your legs, two legs of wood
> Are stronger, and almost as good.

" I cannot agree with the witty dean in this matter, for although a wooden leg may be stronger than one of bone and muscle, yet it is not half so enduring. I have worn out some dozens of wooden legs in my geological and shooting excursions, whilst my natural leg, after years of hard service, has some work left in it yet. . . .

" Though necessarily absent from the army in the field, I continued to receive regular communications from my brother-officers, as well as from a relative in Wellington's army, which enables me to continue the narrative of events up to the Peace of 1815. . . ."

This narrative occupies many subsequent pages of these diaries ; but I do not propose to summarize them here, though their historical interest appears to me considerable. To round off, however, the course of events in the theatre where our chronicler played his part, it will perhaps suffice to say that, after the banishment of Napoleon to Elba, one of the first acts of Louis XVIII was to deliver up those places which

it had been decided that France should no longer hold. Orders were accordingly sent to the commanders of those garrisons to evacuate them and return to France.

In pursuance of this arrangement the gates of Antwerp were opened to the British on the 5th May 1814, and the troops entered the city amid many manifestations of joy on part of the population. The citadel was delivered up the same day, and the French garrison at once left for France.

Later, when the Prince of Orange had sufficiently matured his plans, and the Dutch troops were reorganized, the fortresses were delivered up by the British to them. The English forces thus relieved then entered Belgium, and occupied Tournai, Cambrai, and other places—the 35th Regiment being stationed during most of the ensuing winter at Ghent and Bruges.

To continue extracts from the diaries :

"In July 1814, I joined the regimental depôt at Chichester . . . and by the month of May 1815, was sufficiently recovered from my wounds to be able to ride. Disliking the inactive life at the depôt, where most of the young officers spent the greater part of their time in the billiard-room, and seeing that stirring events were looming in the future, I applied to be sent out to the regiment. Before this arrangement was completed, however, the Battle of Waterloo took place, and so changed the prospects of military men that I had no choice but to retire, without having obtained the promotion, which my friends considered I was entitled to expect. Wounded and cast aside, I devoted myself to the cultivation of natural science and literature. . . .

"When the Duke of Clarence ascended the throne

as William the Fourth, I was urged by my friends to attend a Court Levee ; but I was unwilling to do so lest it should be imagined that, presuming on the performance of an accidental service, or duty, to a Prince of the blood royal, I was determined to obtrude myself on the notice of that prince when he became King. I have no doubt whatever that His Majesty entertained the idea that I had received an appointment which was supposed to be worth £250 per annum, but which in reality only produced £63."

The appointment to which the writer refers is presumably that of " Fort-Major of Our Fort of Duncannon in the County of Wexford, in that part of Our United Kingdom, called Ireland," a commission for which is in our possession, dated the 27th July 1820, and signed by Lord Sidmouth and King George the Fourth, " at Our Court at Carlton House in the first year of Our reign."

This commission is confirmed by another, on the accession of William IV to the throne, and is signed by Lord Melbourne and King William, dated 1st December 1830, " at Our Court at St. James's Palace in the first year of Our reign."

Prior to this is a letter from the War Office, dated 27th April 1815, in which Lieut. Austin is informed that " Having submitted to the Prince Regent your claim to a pension in consideration of your having lost a leg, in His Majesty's service, I have the satisfaction to acquaint you, that His Royal Highness has been graciously pleased in the name and on behalf of His Majesty to grant you a military pension of Seventy Pounds a year, being the rate allowed for a Lieutenant, the Rank in which you were serving at the time of your being wounded. I am to add that the said allow-

ance is to commence from the 3rd February 1815, and that a Warrant has been accordingly prepared and forwarded to the Army Pay Office. I am etc. . . . . Palmerston."

Whether it was on the strength of this wound pension, I cannot say, but the next document that catches my eye is the license for "a marriage solemnized in the Parish of St. Bride's, in the City of London, in the year 1816 between Thomas Austin, Bachelor, and Hannah Austin, a Minor, with the consent of her father, John Austin, and in the presence of John Austin and Mary Ann Austin, on the third day of August 1816."

As the above Thomas Austin was not yet twenty-two years of age, he certainly seems to have crowded much into his young life by adding the experiences of matrimony to the rough usages of war. The youthful couple were soon destined to embark on the cares of bringing up a large family, which gradually grew in numbers to two sons and six daughters, much of whose childhood and adolescence was spent at Duncannon Fort.

It is hardly surprising, therefore, to find that the forgotten Fort-Major at Duncannon continued to agitate for some more lucrative appointment wherewith to meet the pressing requirements of his numerous progeny. Nearly twenty years after losing his leg, he again brought his past services before the authorities; but was again unsuccessful. Lieut. General Sir John Hamilton, Bart., the Governor of Duncannon Fort, accompanied him to the Horse Guards; and before me is the letter of recommendation in the handwriting of General Lord Lynedoch (formerly Sir Thomas Graham), which the suppliant presented to the authorities. It runs thus:

" I can recommend Lieutenant and Fort-Major Austin to notice as a most zealous and intelligent officer, who, on the 13th January 1814, at the attack on the village of Merxem, with a detachment of Light infantry gallantly repulsed and drove back a party of the enemy who had nearly surrounded His Royal Highness the Duke of Clarence, the Duke having in the excitement of the action advanced with the skirmishers in front of our main line of attack. Subsequently this Lieut. Austin received three severe wounds.

" LYNEDOCH, General.

" London, May 22nd, 1833."

" But even this failed to draw any response from the Powers-that-were, so back to Duncannon Fort the disappointed soldier returned. For what precise length of time he held the appointment I am unable to say, for his detailed diaries cease with his campaigning in the Low Countries. But the Army List of 1869 contains the name of Thomas Austin as Fort-Major of Duncannon Fort. He was then 75, and had held the appointment apparently for nearly 50 years ! I presume, however, that he was no longer compelled to reside there continuously, for he had long been a resident of Redland, Bristol, when we youngsters first met him in 1874.

Still, the Irish charge was evidently no sinecure during the earlier years of his tenure ; for considerable trouble appears to have been experienced at the hands of Fenians some time in the early 'thirties. Major Austin was fired on and wounded during one of his frequent shooting excursions in the neighbourhood. Hence the publication of the following proclamation

in poster form, which, yellow with nearly a century of age, confronts me:

DUBLIN CASTLE,
January 24, 1833.

Whereas it has been represented to the Lord Lieutenant, that on Monday, the 16th January instant, as Major Austin was shooting on the Lands of Boderan, near Duncannon Fort, in the County of Wexford, he was fired at and slightly wounded by some Person who escaped; His Excellency, for the better apprehending and bringing to Justice the Perpetrators of this Outrage, is pleased hereby to offer a Reward of

TWO HUNDRED POUNDS

to any Person or Persons, (except the Person or Persons who actually fired the Shot,) who shall, within Six Months from the Date hereof, give such Information as shall lead to the Apprehension and Conviction of all, or any of the Persons concerned therein.

By His Excellency's Command,
WM. GOSSET.

In 1836, Major Austin writes:

"No English person unacquainted with Ireland at the time to which the following correspondence relates can imagine the bitter acrimony that existed between the Irish Protestants and Roman Catholics. When the Lord Lieutenant endeavoured by every means in his power to conciliate those who professed the last-named faith, the Protestants were highly incensed against His Excellency. So strong was this feeling entertained that, with few exceptions, all the Protestant gentry purposely kept aloof from the

route followed by His Majesty's representative in his progress through Ireland.

" In that part of the county of Wexford in which Duncannon Fort is situated, and adjacent places, a picnic was got up at some distant point in order to draw off those Protestants who might have been tempted to witness the ceremony of receiving the Lord Lieutenant.

" Notwithstanding this ruse, Mr. Morris Reade of Rosenara, County of Kilkenny, and a highly influential party with him, came to see the spectacle and were highly gratified at the sight.

" To satisfy the morbid feelings of the Protestants every expedient was tried to foster and keep up the irritation against the Viceroy. Amongst other things, a correspondent in one of the Irish newspapers alleged that on the day of the Lord Lieutenant's visit to Duncannon Fort, the fort was the scene of tumult and disorder and was given over to a rabble of Papists headed by their priests ; and it was insinuated that it was only by their forbearance that the authorities were allowed to resume their control over the place. It was also said that Protestants were insulted."

As may be imagined, allegations of this nature were not permitted to go unchallenged by the offended Fort-Major ; and he at once wrote what he would probably have termed " a spirited disclaimer " to the editor of the paper in question, pointing out the absolutely false account of what had taken place. It concluded as follows :

" Had the fort been given over as alleged, I am sure the Lord Lieutenant would have been prompt in

signifying his displeasure; but as no censure has been passed on my conduct, but the reverse, I have reason to believe His Excellency was not displeased at the arrangements made to receive him. Your correspondent need not be apprehensive about the safety of the fort, for he may rest assured that as long as His Gracious Majesty entrusts me with its command it will not be taken possession of by any hostile force, either native or foreign, in the easy way he imagines."

Fort-Major Austin and his family, it may be added, were all Protestants. Despite occasional pin-pricks of the nature described above, he appears to have passed many happy years with his wife and children in Duncannon Fort. In those days fishing and shooting were plentiful in the neighbourhood; and, keen sportsman that he was, the disability of a wooden leg was not going to prevent him taking a full share in his favourite pastimes. The bogs around abounded with snipe, duck and other water-fowl; so, on to the base of the wooden leg he screwed a thin circular board, about a foot in diameter, to prevent it sinking deep into the marshes; and thus equipped, the indefatigable hunter stumped his way through in pursuit of game.

What with fishing, shooting, geological excursions, and writing poetry and prose in his leisure moments, the years passed pleasantly enough in Ireland; and when, finally, the major settled down in Bristol the old warrior entered heart and soul into the proceedings of various scientific societies in that town, where he was soon regarded as no mean authority at such gatherings. And though close on 80 years of age when we first met him, his activity was still striking, and his mental faculties unimpaired.

His thoughts always remained, however, with the army he had loved and served in with such keenness, but for so brief a span in the field. Nevertheless, he was a stern critic of all jobbery and inefficiency at one time so rife in it. He delighted, too, in corresponding with his old companions-in-arms, until death gradually removed them from the reach of his pen. Even so late as 1868 he derived much pleasure in receiving a pat on the back from his old commanding officer of 1813–14, Colonel MacAlester, who must have been a very old man when he wrote :

My dear Austin,

The sight of your handwriting gave me, as it always does, if not positive delight at all events unmixed satisfaction. It reminds me of the times when we were in the fighting trade a long time ago, and that at least *one* of my old Camarados has not ceased to regard me with that quasi-affection and esteem that I feel for him. I must say that we old soldiers are a warm-hearted set after all.

Having distinguished yourself as you did in the service, and having fought hard for the distinction a confounded deal more than you were paid for it, I have not the slightest doubt that the remembrance of it sometimes slips in between the *ologies*, and that you smile at the recollection of what ' Little Tommy ' Austin once was and what he now is. It is by no means improbable that you may occasionally find yourself, unintentionally, humming ' Orange Boven Huzza,' etc.

Ever, my dear Austin,

Yours faithfully,

C. MacAlester.

And here we will take leave of the old major, his disappointments somewhat soothed, perhaps, by the assurance that he who should have best known his military capacity in the past fully appreciated the merits of the young subaltern, who had served under him long years before.

After a happy married life of close on sixty-five years, the old veteran passed home to his rest in his 87th year on 25th March 1881. He was buried in the Arno's Vale Cemetery in Bristol, where he was joined by his devoted wife a few years later. His ancient uniform, and a photograph of him in it, together with a brief record of his career, were presented to the Bristol Museum by one of my brothers in 1917, and there occupy an honoured place to-day, near the geological collection left by the major to the Museum on his death.